

# Enterprise—



## Log

a Star Trek  
fanzine

## Entries

## 64

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Illos - Cover, Martin Delaney  
P 2, Pendragon

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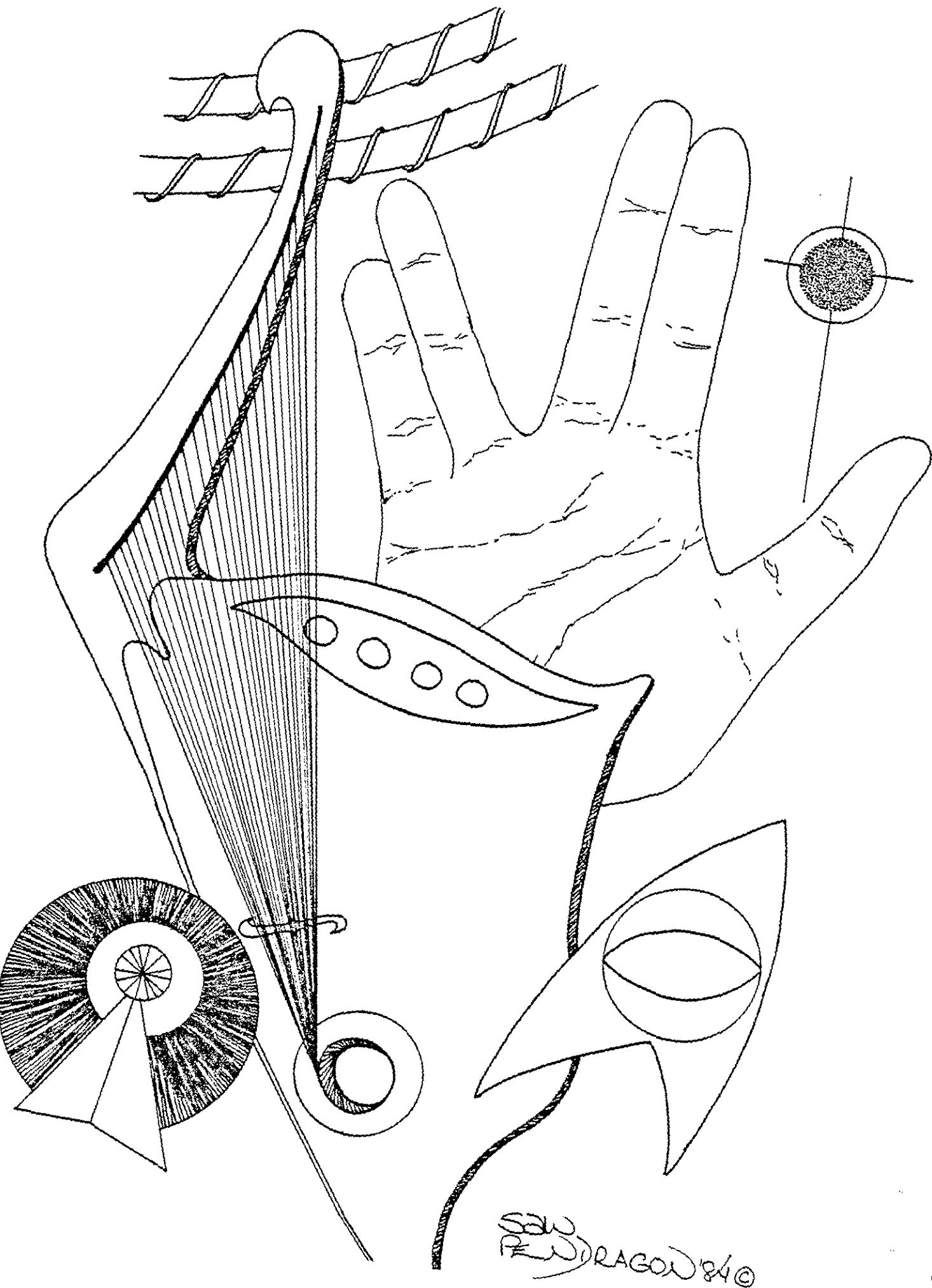
Editors - Sheila Clark, Valerie Piacentini  
Typing - Sheila Clark  
Proofreading - Janet Quarton, Sheila Clark & Valerie Piacentini  
Printing of Masters - Janet Quarton  
Printing - Warped Out Publications Inc.  
Distracting - Shona

Enterprise - Log Entries 64 is put out by ScoTpress and is available from -

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6 Craigmill Cottages  
Strathmartine  
by Dundee  
Scotland

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# the WHICH of HENDAU

## David Gomm

CAPTAIN'S LOG Stardate 5952.3 The Enterprise is in orbit above Hendau IV, a primitive planet situated at the far extremity of the neutral zone between Klingon and Federation territories. Our mission: to investigate reports that Klingon agents have been infiltrating the native population in direct violation of the non-interference treaty.

Kirk, Spock and a worried-looking McCoy took their places in the transporter room.

"Jim." The doctor's voice was almost pleading. "Can't you give us any idea what kind of interference we're supposed to be looking for?"

"Bones, I only wish I could. I don't even know myself. Our orders are simply to observe and gather evidence. On no account are we to interfere with whatever is going on. The matter will be dealt with at the highest diplomatic levels." He nodded to the technician at the transporter controls. "Energise."

"Bridge to Captain Kirk."

Kirk raised his hand quickly, cancelling the order. "Yes, what is it, Scotty?"

"Sorry to trouble you, sir, but we're getting a priority one distress call on the Intergalactic Distress Frequency."

"Can't you handle it?"

"Aye, sir, I could, but... " Scott hesitated. " ...Something doesn't smell right."

"I'm on my way. Spock, Bones, proceed without me. I'll join you later." He nodded again to the technician, who in turn glanced up at the landing party.

"Energise," confirmed Spock. The depleted party beamed down to the surface of the planet, leaving the Captain of the Enterprise free to hurry back to the bridge of his ship.

The river was narrow, fast-moving and very deep. Its banks were empty except for a see-saw like contraption, one end of which culminated in a low-backed wooden chair.

The crowd of people converging on this piece of apparatus was too absorbed in what it was doing to notice that its numbers had been increased by two, the taller of whom was wearing a floppy brown velvet cap to hide

the tops of his ears. The crowd was in an ugly mood, half carrying, half dragging a smallish youth dressed in a baggy jump-suit of green and yellow checkerboard design. The only one unconcerned was the victim himself, who clapped his hands and beamed about him with a vapid grin which had an almost child-like quality.

Arriving at the river bank, the crowd stopped abruptly. Their leader, dark-complexioned and at least a head taller than his companions, held up his hand for silence.

"Charges of witchcraft having been laid against the defendant, Lenqii, the accused will be accorded his right of confession. Let the trial begin."

Several pairs of hands competed to lift the victim into the chair.

"What the blazes is that thing?" hissed McCoy to Spock.

"If my memory of primitive customs serves me correctly, it is what is known as a 'ducking stool'. Designed, I believe, to help witches confess."

"But that's barbaric."

"Primitive planets usually are, Doctor." Unobtrusively, Spock drew his cap a little more firmly about his ears. As he was doing so, something about the crowd's leader caught his attention. "Be careful how you look, Doctor, but does anything strike you as curious about that man's footwear?" He winced slightly as McCoy, never the subtlest of men, spun round, stared at the leader's feet, and gasped,

"Klingon manufacture. I'd know it anywhere."

"I thought so too. It would seem that we now know the nature of Klingon interference. It only remains to secure the evidence." And, as McCoy looked at him blankly, "Clearly the Klingons are exploiting these people's superstitions by setting themselves up as witch-finders. From there, it is only a short step to establishing some form of high priesthood, and with it, unlimited control over undeveloped minds. Doctor, *don't stare at that man!*"

Spock's urgent warning came too late. Klingon-feet, finding himself the focus of such obvious attention, reacted instinctively. A moment later, the concealed weapon, drawn from the folds of his tunic, was pointing unwaveringly at the doctor's heart.

"What's the trouble, Scotty?" Jim Kirk, as ever, was taking charge of the situation even before the bridge doors had a chance to close behind him.

"No' trouble, exactly, sir. Just... " The Chief Engineer tapped his nose significantly.

"Explain."

"We've computed the range of the distress call, sir," explained Deputy Science Officer Kinshaw, standing at Spock's usual station.

"And?"

"It's hard to be sure because there's strong sunspot activity on

Hendau and it's distorting the signal. But according to the sensors, the only vessel in the vicinity is a Klingon ship of a very advanced design."

"The Klingons have the same Intergalactic rights as anyone else, Miss Kinshaw. In peacetime, at any rate."

"They have the right to use the I.G.D.F. sir," put in Uhura. "But I've never known them actually do so. Or even monitor it."

"They're too damned stubborn proud to admit they ever need help," added Scott.

"And you suspect a trap?"

"Aye, sir, I do."

"And so do I," Kirk admitted. "But we have no choice. A priority one distress call takes precedence over all other considerations. Compute a course, please, Mr. Sulu. Warp factor five."

"I think I can get her on visual, sir," reported Uhura, a few minutes later.

"Put it on the screen."

A small gasp rippled round the bridge. The vessel was unlike anything they had ever seen. Its design was plainly Klingon, but the usual predatory lines had been subtly altered. This ship looked sleek, elegant - and deadly. Scott drew in his breath sharply, through his teeth.

"My, but she's a beauty," he gasped. "Sorry, old girl," added, as if to soothe the Enterprise's ruffled feelings.

"Isn't she just!" exclaimed D.S.O. Kinshaw, who had no such inhibitions. Her fierce and unswerving loyalty was reserved for her superior officer, and left little room for mere hardware.

"Life forms, Miss Kinshaw?" and, more sharply as the D.S.O. continued to stare spellbound at the beautiful ship on the screen, "Miss Kinshaw!"

"Sorry, sir." The D.S.O. dragged her attention reluctantly back to the sensors. "Just three, sir. Two on the bridge, and one..." She flipped a switch, bringing a plan of a standard Klingon ship up on the computer's display screen, "...in the transporter room, if they haven't moved it. I've asked the computer for an analysis of recent developments in Klingon design."

"Positive fix, sir," interrupted Uhura. "She is definitely the source of the distress call."

"Very well. Open a hailing frequency."

"Hailing frequency open, sir."

Kirk paused for a moment to collect his thoughts. Then -

"This is Captain James T. Kirk of the United Space Ship Enterprise. We come in peace in response to your distress call. What is the nature of your problem? I say again, please state your problem. Over."

But there was no response; the only sound was the crackling interference due to the strong stellar winds from the very active star, Hendau.

"I don't like it, Captain," said Chekov doubtfully.

"You very seldom do, Mr. Chekov." Kirk's smile robbed the words of any offence. "Scotty, return to engineering. Take a security detachment with you. Prepare to beam survivors aboard."

"Closing fast, sir," warned Sulu. "Activate shields?"

"I can only give you half power for the shields if you want to use the transporter at this range and speed."

"Give us the best you can, Mr. Scott. Lt. Uhura, sound red alert. Shields, please, Mr. Sulu. Reduce speed to warp factor one." He caught Chekov's eye. "For your information, Mr. Chekov, I don't like it either. Miss Kinshaw, have you got that read-out yet?"

"Very little known, sir. Except that the newest ships are believed to be equipped with Amaser weaponry."

"About which we have no first-hand knowledge."

"Excuse me, sir" came Chekov's worried voice, "I think we're going to find out. Look."

From the pods at the tips of the Klingon's gracefully swept bridge structure, two bands of darkness were spreading outwards at incredible speed, towards the Enterprise. The stars in their path seemed to be snuffed out like candles; even the surrounding blackness of space appeared bright by comparison. The Enterprise reeled as if struck by a mighty fist, not clenched but grasping, as the beams of simulated anti-matter stripped away her shields like the dried outer skin of an onion.

Damage and casualty reports began flooding in.

"Evasive action, Mr. Sulu."

Beads of sweat began to appear on Sulu's forehead as he wrestled with the controls. "She's not answering the helm, sir."

"Engineering to bridge," followed the bleep of the intercom.

"Go ahead, Scotty."

"One more like that will finish us, sir. There's no way we can regenerate the shields in time."

"I read you, Scotty. Miss Kinshaw, enemy's defensive status?"

Sensors report no shields of any kind, sir."

"Very good. Mr. Sulu, arm photon torpedoes."

"I'm still getting that distress signal, sir," reported Uhura. Indeed, they could all hear the anguished signal, even though Uhura had faded the distress frequency to minimum volume.

Uncharacteristically, Kirk hesitated. To fire upon a defenceless ship, one which was emitting a priority one distress call, was a war crime of the first magnitude. Even though the Klingon vessel had itself committed an aggressive act, to destroy it went against all his instincts and training.

Sulu's urgent voice broke into his thoughts. "Optimum firing pattern

in nineteen seconds, sir. After that she'll be able to pick us off at will."

"Thank you. Computer, please log that I take full responsibility. Fire in your own time, Mr. Sulu."

"And make that very soon," muttered Chekov under his breath.

"Photon torpedoes up and running, sir."

The Enterprise seemed to hold her breath, in anticipation of another of her adversary's deadly salvos. None came. Instead, a faint glow, instantly extinguished, appeared on the Klingon's bridge and D.S.O. Kinshaw was able to report, "No life forms left aboard, sir."

Seconds later, the first torpedo struck home.

Spock's phaser was set to no more than a light stun, but the effect on Klingon-feet was devastating. He reeled towards the riverbank, flailing his arms wildly. At the very moment of toppling in with an almighty splash, his body disappeared in a blaze of incandescent light. Out of sight of the watchers, something large moved rapidly downstream, leaving a phosphorescent trail behind it.

"People of Hendau Four!" With more humanity than discretion, Dr. McCoy was already championing the cause of the unfortunate Lenqii who, unnoticed in all the excitement, had scrambled out of the ducking chair. "Listen to me. You have been misled. There is no such thing as witchcraft - or witches." At which point, Lenqii rather spoiled the effect by announcing proudly, "I'm a witch."

"No, you're not, sonny. Nobody is. Witches are just for story books."

"I am, too," pouted Lenqii sulkily.

"Then how about proving it? Let me see now. I know, why don't you try turning me into a toad?"

Lenqii's face fell. "I can't do toads," he admitted. McCoy smiled, as if to say, *You see, what did I tell you?* but Lenqii went on. "I do a good tortoise, though."

Now that their interest had been aroused, all trace of the crowd's earlier hostility had disappeared. There were encouraging murmurs of "Yes, go on, Lenqii", "A tortoise, Lenqii", and so on. Lenqii, almost casually, raised his arm and pointed it at Dr. McCoy.

"For the last time," cried McCoy in exasperation, "I tell you there is no such thing as magic!"

"In that case, Doctor," said Spock, who had taken up a position behind him, "why are you turning into what I presume to be a tortoise?"

"That's ridiculous, Spock."

"Nevertheless, Doctor, it is - happening."

Indeed it was. The shimmer of light encasing McCoy's body was not dissimilar to that emitted by the transporter at the moment of energising.



But in this instance the effect was not instantaneous transmission to a distant place but a slow-motion metamorphosis of great smoothness, as McCoy assumed the form of a small quadruped with a face not totally unlike his own and having on its back a round, hard shell.

"Fascinating!" breathed Spock.

He was not allowed to enjoy his fascination for long. Eager hands pinioned him from behind. One hand, more daring than the rest, pulled off his cap, revealing his ears, at the sight of which Lenzii clapped his hands with glee.

"Lovely, lovely ears! Now what can we turn this one into? What has lovely long pointed ears?"

"A rabbit?" suggested somebody.

"Rabbits are boring. I know, how about a fox? I'm jolly good at foxes. Then the fox can chase the tortoise."

There was a second shimmering of light. Spock, absorbed in the transformation of McCoy, and quite oblivious of his own predicament, took a couple of steps forward and sniffed at the tortoise, whose head and feet promptly retreated inside its shell.

It is not easy for a fox to lift one eyebrow. Spock's managed it with great aplomb. Then, experimentally, he put out a paw and prodded, causing McCoy to rotate slowly on his hard underbelly.

"Cut it out, Spock!" snarled McCoy, as best he could in the circumstances.

Above them, the atmosphere was one of disappointment.

"Go on, Fox, nice Fox, chase the silly tortoise, don't play with it!" wheedled Lenzii. His voice hardened. "All right, then, if you won't chase, you'll have to be chased." With a final shimmering of light, Dr. McCoy metamorphosed a second time, becoming now a large - a very large - hound, quivering as though on a tight leash.

"Take a grip on yourself, Doctor," admonished Spock. "It's quite simple. I have my creature under perfect control."

"Well, good for you, Mr. Spock," growled - literally growled - Dr. McCoy, his voice manifesting itself inside Spock's vulpine head, unmistakably McCoy but with definite Baskervillian overtones. "You never had an instinct in your cold Vulcan life, so of course that poor thing doesn't stand a chance. I - we - are fairly crawling with instincts. And they're all hostile."

Spock put his mind to the problem. "Perhaps the mind meld," he mused. "On second thoughts, perhaps not. To make contact I should have to come within range of those teeth. They look sharp. That would not be the logical approach at this stage."

"To hell with your logic, Spock. I'm telling you I can't hold this brute in check much longer. Run, dammit, run!"

Spock ran.

Behind them, the entire crowd took to the water as Klingon-feet had done, with only an intermingling network of phosphorescence to show that they had ever been.

Repairs were still proceeding as the Enterprise limped painfully back into standard orbit.

It had taken only one torpedo to obliterate the unshielded vessel. The remaining three had passed harmlessly through its vapourised ghost, to dissipate their energies in the emptiness of space. As the Klingon died, so had the distress call, not immediately, but fading into silence over a period of several seconds.

The recordings of the incident were authenticated and stored away in the computer log, possible evidence in the event of an enquiry. There would be time enough to study them in detail later. For the moment there were more important matters awaiting attention.

Attempts to contact the landing party had met with no success. D.S.O. Kinshaw, a worried little frown creasing her forehead, reported that although the sensors showed marine life in abundance, the only life on the planet's single land mass was definitely not humanoid.

It was on the third orbit that Lt. Commander Scott reported a strange malfunction in the transporter room. "It seems to occur when we pass between the satellite and the planet itself," he said when his Captain and the D.S.O. had joined him. "Coming up any moment now."

Sure enough, a few seconds later there came the sound of transporter activity, even though the control console was unmanned and the transporter itself was powered down. Simultaneously, two infinitely thin rays of yellow-white light passed through the transporter, vanishing as quickly as they had appeared, as the Enterprise moved out of the satellite's shadow.

"Fascinating," said D.S.O. Kinshaw, in her best Mr. Spock manner. "Well, intriguing, anyway," she amended hastily as Kirk looked at her sharply.

"Can you put us in synchronous orbit, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, sir. I thought you'd say that - computer's already working on it."

There was a slight increase in engine room activity as the computer smoothly matched the orbit of the Enterprise with that of the planet's moon. Sure enough, the phenomenon was repeated.

"O.K., Scotty, let's see what we've got. Bring them aboard."

For a while nothing much seemed to happen. Then they heard it; faint but quite clear despite a confused and confusing background of animal sounds, the transporter room became diffused with voices. *And the voices were those of Dr. McCoy and Mr. Spock.*

Then babel and bedlam combined into one. Two rays of light became a hundred, and the room was filled with a horrid cacophony of sound; many voices gabbling in a harsh alien tongue, and above them, the howls of a pack of wild animals scenting blood.

"Captain." The Communications Officer's voice rose above the din. "We have a visual of the planet's surface I think you should see."

"Put it through here."

The screen on the console glowed, flickered then cleared. The picture showed two animals, one chasing the other, both apparently unaware that they themselves were being pursued...

...by a pack of ravening wolves.

McCoy ran Spock to earth in a narrow ravine. More correctly, Spock allowed himself to be run to earth, having seen just the rock formation he needed in order to gain height over his opponent. Nimble he scrambled up a ledge onto a rocky outcrop, leaving the hound, faster but less agile, baying helplessly below. Then, unexpectedly, instead of making good his escape, he turned, measured his jump and dropped like a stone, burying his forepaws in the scruff of McCoy's neck.

Both logic and execution were perfect. That the ploy failed was simply due to the fact that the fox did not have the sensitivity of touch essential for the Vulcan nerve pinch. Spock was forced to fall back on his second line of defence. Appearing to lose his balance, he fell awkwardly, momentarily exposing his white throat to McCoy's jaws. As the hound snapped, Spock shifted his weight slightly, causing the teeth to bury themselves painfully but harmlessly in his right shoulder.

At the first touch, the Vulcan mindmeld was established. It took only a few moments of joint effort to subdue the canine element of McCoy's dual personality.

"I think that should be sufficient, Doctor," said Spock, when it was done. "Now, if you wouldn't mind releasing me, I believe that we shall shortly have company."

The pair took shelter in a cave, whose entrance was so narrow that only one wolf could enter at a time, and that very slowly, so that any one rash enough to try was forced to retreat with a well-bloodied nose.

"Now, then, Spock," began McCoy when he had finally caught his breath, "do you mind telling me how in thunder we've managed to get ourselves... bewitched.. like this?"

"There is no such thing as witchcraft, Doctor," said Spock infuriatingly. "You said so yourself. Several times. Besides, it is perfectly clear what has happened."

"Not to me."

"Then consider. We are agreed that there is no such thing as magic?" McCoy nodded. "Then our own bodies were not actually transformed into these quadrupeds. If we discount the possibility of illusion - and these teeth-marks in my shoulder feel uncomfortably real - then we are left with the conclusion that our bodies have been transported elsewhere. Obviously, whoever staged that performance for our benefit has access to an advanced form of matter transmitter which can simultaneously transport two bodies into each other's physical location, while leaving their minds linked. Naturally, the Vulcan intellect being vastly superior to that of the - fox - I was able to achieve complete dominance."

"Speak for yourself, Spock."

"I was, Doctor. The question now arises of how to reverse the process." Spock paused. "Here, I must confess, I am at a loss."

Much the same question was being debated aboard the Enterprise, where

the conversation had been monitored. In the end it was D.S.O. Kinshaw, fresh out of Technical Training School and with her mind still full of Technological History, who came up with the answer.

"Captain." (Eagerly.)

"Yes, Miss Kinshaw?"

"Didn't the early transporters have a problem synchronising mind and body?"

Now that she mentioned it, everybody on the bridge remembered hearing horror stories of perfectly functioning bodies arriving as cabbages, or disembodied minds whose bodies had been atomised across twenty parsecs of space.

"What's your idea?"

"If we by-passed the fail-safe mechanism, couldn't we rig the transporter to capture mind and body separately and reassemble them as one?"

"And where do we look for the real McCoy?" asked Kirk, with unconscious humour.

"Well, if one of those lines is in contact with the two animals, it would seem logical..." She paused, expressively; her chief, she thought, would have been proud of her.

"On the moon!" Kirk exclaimed.

"Aye, it might work at that," admitted Scott, when the idea was put to him. "Right, lassie, we'll try it. Just give us a couple of hours."

"Scotty," cut in his Captain. "You've less than half that. There's another Klingon vessel, at extreme range but closing fast. She looks as if she means business."

In fact, it was less than fifty minutes before the Klingon was within hailing distance. Its commander's message was brief, unfriendly and without preamble.

"Identify yourselves before you die."

"This is the U.S.S. Enterprise, Captain James T. Kirk. And - " coldly - "I was not aware that any state of war existed between us."

"A matter of hours, only, Captain. The Federation's attempts to enslave the minds of the Hendaunans have been causing concern to the Klingon High Command for some time. One of our newest ships was despatched to investigate. Where is that ship?"

"I destroyed it," replied Kirk evenly. "In self-defence."

"Oh, really, Captain. 'Self-defence' against a crippled vessel calling for aid?"

Before Kirk could reply, there was a flurry of saluting on the Klingon bridge, and a new face appeared on the screen.

"Greetings, James Kirk."

"Commander Kang!"

"Commodore Kang," the Klingon corrected him. The corners of his mouth twitched, less in mirth than in recollection of the time the two of them had laughed together. "You should join a navy in which those who merit promotion receive it. I am truly sorry that it is I who should be the agent of your destruction."

"Wait! I have proof that what I say is true. If you will beam across it will take only a few minutes to show it to you. In fact - " A thought struck him - "It is imperative that you beam aboard the Enterprise without delay. Millions of lives may depend on it."

"Do you take us for fools, Captain?" The Klingon commander laughed scornfully.

His superior motioned him to silence. "This is one Earthman I would trust with my life - for no better reason than I already have. Very well, Kirk. I will come aboard your ship. There will be a fifteen minute truce. Then we will blast you out of the galaxy."

"So your commander was quite right." Kirk switched off the recording and turned to face Kang. "There was a distress signal. But it would be interesting to know how he knew about it. The Klingons never use that frequency themselves, nor do they bother to monitor it."

"That is indeed an interesting question," mused Kang. He faced the commander's image on the screen. "And one to which I would like an answer."

He was doomed to disappointment. The commander had already disappeared, in a blaze of phosphorescent light.

If Kang was surprised he hid the fact well. "No matter. As to your recording, Kirk, you have spoken the truth, as I have come to expect from you. I should have acted in exactly the same way myself. Except that I would not have hesitated for so long. But it makes no difference. That was my flagship, under my command. I left her for a few hours to communicate with High Command away from Hendau's radio interference, leaving my wife Mara still aboard. Now my wife and my crew are dead. Our code leaves me no choice. They must be avenged."

"That will not be necessary, Commander." Mr. Spock, himself again, stood framed in the bridge doorway. He eyed Kang's insignia. "I beg your pardon. Commodore. Your ship was derelict. There are your crew."

All eyes turned to the screen, whose image had reverted to the wolf pack on the surface of Hendau IV. Kang's face contorted with fury.

"Are you mocking me...?" he began, then stopped abruptly. "No - Vulcans never mock."

Spock inclined his head. "Thank you. In any case, the proof is easy. I happened to notice one female who appeared in particularly fine fettle. Yes, there. Have you got her, Mr. Scott?"

"Aye, Mr. Spock, coming right up." Sure enough, the indicated she-wolf disappeared from the pack and a minute or so later, Mara, escorted

by Dr. McCoy and D.S.O. Kinshaw, joined them on the bridge.

The air filled with questions. How? Why? Who or what?

Spock explained, taking the questions in their proper order.

"Miss Kinshaw was, of course, quite correct in her surmise. The satellite contains a well-stocked body-bank. The beings stored there have undoubtedly been used as we were today, to lend intelligence to the planet's own fauna, but their main purpose must be to provide mobile vehicles for the brains behind this. Work has begun to restore all bodies to normal and beam them aboard one ship or the other. Incidentally, Commodore, I think you will find your ship's commander among them." He paused, remembering the riverbank. "An individual conspicuous of foot, as I recall."

For the second time aboard the Enterprise, Kang laughed.

"The reason," Spock went on, "would seem to have been an attempt to start a war between the Klingons and the Federation. As to who or what, clearly we are dealing with an intelligence of the highest order, one which has developed telekinesis to an art-form. I would guess at an aquatic creature having no technology of its own. We may never know precisely what, but on the other hand - Ah!"

The bridge became filled with beautifully modulated voices, amid a subdued background of clicks and whistles. The image on the screen changed, revealing a school of dolphin-like creatures, whose leader had a distinctive green and yellow checkered effect on his skin. He displayed the characteristic playful grin of the dolphin, but in his eyes there was a most undolphin-like glint.

"Very clever, Mr. Fox. I knew I'd made the right choice for you."

"Lenqii," acknowledged Spock gravely.

"What are you?" demanded Kirk.

Lenqii spread his flippers expressively. "As you see. Not just any old dolphins, of course. Delphinus Superior, our creator called us. My ancestors were brought here many years ago. Which and What, their names were. I am the thirteenth Which of Hendau, but they call me Lenqii."

"And the other animals?"

"Brought here too." Lenqii's dolphin grin widened still further. "No toads, though, Doctor! The creator, besides being unusually intelligent for a mere Human, had highly-developed extra-sensory powers. Especially telekinesis. He conceived the idea of implanting his powers in a superior brain, such as a dolphin's, to produce a whole new intellect, greater than the sum of its component parts. He succeeded all too well. Besides his mental powers, we inherited some of man's other qualities. Ambition. Envy. Even evil. Sadly, the creator died before he could teach us to curb them." It might have been a trick of the light or the result of several droplets of water coalescing into one; for a moment it looked as if the dolphin was weeping for an innocence lost forever.

"Lost innocence can never be recaptured," said Spock, echoing the unspoken thought. "But it can be reborn."

There was an uncomfortable silence, shattered by the bleep of the intercom. "All transportations completed, Captain," reported Scott.



The look of mischief returned to Lenqii's face. "We could easily bring them back again, you know," he said. "And without a dumb old machine."

"You could," agreed Kirk. "But you won't. We may need a machine, but we do have the capability. And I know of a hundred Klingons who would be happy to return to Hendaui as sharks for an hour or two. Right, Commodore?"

"Right," Kang snarled. "A hundred and one, in fact."

"Understood, Lenqii?"

"Understood, Captain." With a swirl of water and a final mocking wave of his tail at the Enterprise, Lenqii and his companions were gone.

Kirk held out his hand. "Goodbye, Commodore Kang," he said, "Mara. May we never meet in wartime. I should hate to be the agent of your destruction."

Kang's eyes blazed angrily for a moment. Then, for the third and last time aboard the Enterprise, he threw back his head and laughed.

"Two to beam across, Mr. Scott. Mr. Sulu, prepare to take us out of orbit. Warp factor three."

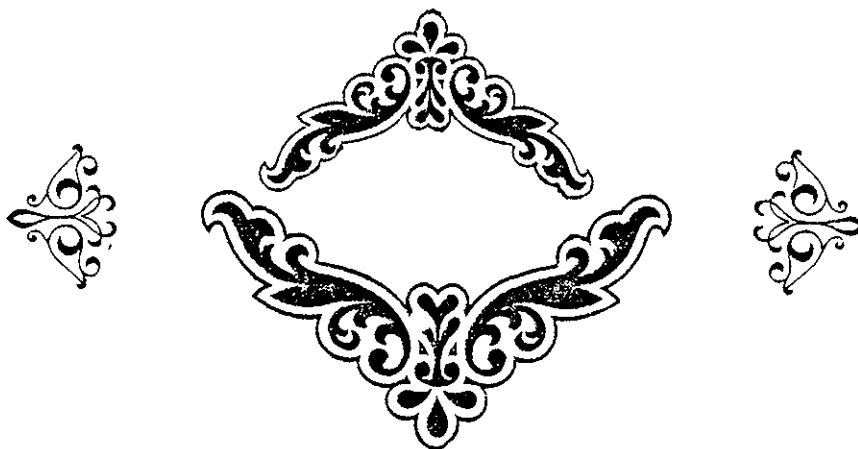
"But why try to start a war for heaven's sake, Spock?"

"I have no idea, Doctor. Fear of two powerful neighbours, perhaps, hoping that they would neutralise one another? To increase space activity around Hendaui would attract a fresh supply of victims and space hardware? Possibly even mischief, pure and simple. Who knows?"

He shrugged his shoulders and winced in sudden pain. D.S.O. Kinshaw started forward, her face filled with concern.

"It's nothing, Miss Kinshaw," Spock assured her. He avoided McCoy's eye. "Somebody appears to have bitten me in the shoulder."

The D.S.O. turned back to her sensors, muttering under her breath. "Some people have all the luck!"



# Return to Yesterday

## Janice Pitkethley

I am confined to quarters on Dr. McCoy's instructions after my return from the mission to enter the amoeba entity. He said I require rest and recuperation; my thoughts are entirely different! His eternal fussing is almost too much to bear - he comes to examine me at very frequent intervals. Totally unnecessary!

The hours seem to pass so slowly, even though I have many visitors. The Captain is coming down tonight after his watch is over to finish a chess game we started.

I have made a fascinating discovery; tucked away in a corner among my personal property, I found a diary. The handwriting is my own, a barely recognisable childlike form of script. It appears to have been written when I was only five years old. I shall destroy the manuscript after reading it, as it must reveal too much of my inner self...

...no school today! Father is displeased with me. The boys at school were tormenting me again, calling me 'Earther', 'halfbreed' and other names. I struck them! Father has given me a long lecture on Vulcan philosophy and logic, he said that I must learn to control these illogical feelings inside me... Mother knew there was something wrong when I came home from school. Later, I saw her crying. It disturbs me...

...This morning the messenger came to our home. I saw his aircar arrive and he brought out a large crate. The messenger always brings packages for my mother, they arrive at the spaceport after the long journey from Earth. Being curious (another emotion?) I went to see what he had brought this time. Mother called my name and said the package was addressed to me. Who could have sent me this? I have an aunt and several cousins on Earth, obviously they must have sent me this mysterious package... but why?

"Open it, Spock." Mother's voice broke into my thoughts. I sensed her excitement as she wanted to see what it contained. The things they sent were often so strange.

I opened the top of the crate and our jumped a strange little animal. It had long floppy ears and a tail which lashed from side to side. The creature leaped onto my knee and licked my face with a warm, wet tongue, its whole body wriggling as its tail whipped.

"What is it?"

Mother was smiling at me. She picked up the little animal and it nestled against her. "It is a puppy, a little dog. Your cousins have sent it."

She placed the puppy in my arms again. It made a whining

sound and licked my chin. Inside, although I tried hard to prevent it, I experienced a warm feeling for this little creature. With a shock, I realised it was showing affection for me, the love shining from its big brown eyes.

The puppy raced around the house, exploring its new surroundings, then it flopped down on the cool flooring and looked up at mother and me as if to say 'Well, I am home...' Mother said I would have to give the puppy a name, and that it is a female. After some consideration I decided to call the puppy Shu-lan. Translated from Vulcan that means 'Shining Light', just like her eyes. What will father say when he sees her? I am concerned about that...

...Father has accepted the presence of Shu-lan in our home. He has travelled to Earth many times, something like... the amount is too great for me to count. Anyway, he says that dogs are very intelligent creatures although emotional. I almost saw a look of surprise on his face when Shu-lan attempted to climb up onto his knee! But she is too small to do so.

...I am in disgrace again. When nightfall came, the puppy would not settle down. I heard her crying during the night and went downstairs and took her to my room. Mother was displeased when she saw Shu-lan sleeping on my bed.

Today I introduced Shu-lan to I-Chaya the sehlat. I-Chaya growled at this strange animal who had dared to invade his territory. The dog whined at sight of the sehlat, then ran to greet him. I-Chaya lowered his head and snuffled at the dog, catching her scent. Shu-lan responded by licking his nose! I returned later to find them both asleep, Shu-lan curled up at the sehlat's side. I am pleased they have accepted each other.

...Tonight I took Shu-lan out for the first time when it was cool. I-Chaya followed us, something he does not normally do. On the way home, I encountered some schoolmates. Immediately they began to taunt me, especially when they saw Shu-lan. One boy who is older than I pushed me to the ground - then a strange thing happened. The fur rose on the back of Shu-lan's neck and, growling, she bit my tormentor on the leg! Although small, she caused a deep wound. The rest of the boys backed away and ran off when I-Chaya came to my defence also. A fully-grown angry sehlat is a formidable sight! My brave animals... the only friends I have.

Mother was concerned when I arrived home bleeding from a cut on my head and another on my knee. As she dressed them, I told her how the animals had come to my rescue. How hard I tried to hold back the emotion welling up inside me. I remember saying to myself, 'I must not cry - I am a Vulcan. Mother sensed the conflict with my Human half; she did not speak, only drawing me into her arms. I try hard not to recoil at the contact, as it hurts her.

The closeness of our contact was making the feelings inside me much worse. Without realising what I was doing, I laid my head against Mother's shoulder as the Vulcan barriers broke down. She held me and stroked my hair as I cried...

I closed the book, reliving the pain of my childhood. How harsh it had been; I try not to think of those terrible years.

The door-call sounded and I was only half aware of replying "Come". Captain Kirk walked in and saw me with the diary still in my hands. He respects my privacy, but I knew he was curious.

"What's wrong, Spock?" He sat down, looking intently from my face to the closed book. "Come on, something is troubling you. Want to talk about it?"

"... I found this diary, written when I was a child. It disturbed me."

A look of concern crossed his face. "Bones said you were to rest. Put it away and forget about it." He reached out to take it from me.

"I want you to read it, Jim."

"Are you sure?"

On my nod of affirmation, he opened the book and began to read. I watched the raw emotion cross his face as he learned of the inner conflict and emotion of my troubled childhood. There were tears in his eyes when he had finished. "No wonder it disturbed you, Spock. I never realised..."

I rose and placed the diary in the waste disposal. The record of a painful episode in my life had gone forever. Jim is my friend as well as my Captain; he will never reveal to anyone what he has learned. I turned to feel his hand on my shoulder and the hazel eyes were warm as he smiled at me.

"Come on, Spock - let's get that chess game finished."

## My T'HY'LA, My FRIEND



I thought the memory of you was gone, banished,  
But now in the mist of Kohlinar  
I sense your thoughts, my t'hy'la, and fear.  
Now it is as the Vulcan dawn,  
Emotion, strong.  
Now in the mist of Kohlinar  
I cannot break those ties.  
- I tried...  
and failed.  
I had no choice but to return  
And stand at your side  
once more -  
My t'hy'la.  
And as always,  
When you need me,  
I'll be there -  
My t'hy'la...

... my friend.

J. Devlin

# U. F. O!

## Janice Pitkethley

High among the L-Langdon Mountains stood the imposing building of the Sho-Lann, almost like the old monasteries of Earth. The Vulcan Elders had lived there since the Time of Surak. Once a year, the great doors were opened to admit young students; here the Elders gave instruction to their pupils, teaching them advanced Vulcan Philosophy and giving them all the benefits of their long years of wisdom before the young Vulcans were returned to their homes.

This was a quiet time; the students would not be arriving for many months. Savel stopped in his task of weeding the vegetable garden and looked up at the black peaks surrounding him, shielding his eyes against the sun's glare. Among the peaks the Kylakii swooped and soared on the hot currents of air rising from the desert sands far below. He suppressed a shudder as he looked at the black, wheeling forms, a cross between bird and reptile; the Kylakii were fearless and would attack anything, even Vulcans. Their harsh cries echoed among the mountains as he bent to his task once more.

Savel was old, almost nearing the end of his long life-span. Many times he had caught himself looking across the desert sands in the direction of Shikahr and wondering what it must be like there. He could not imagine life away from the Sho-Lann, he had been there for so long.

"I must not think these illogical thoughts!" he reprimanded himself, laying down the weeding tool and walking towards the Gardens of Thought. There, he steepled his fingers, composing himself for meditation.

The peace and tranquillity shattered rudely as he returned to instant awareness at the sound of a mewling cry. It came again from the direction of the Nightbloom bushes. Savel carefully parted the thick foliage; there lay a sehlat cub, cowering and frightened, its small furry back scarred and bloodstained.

*What has done this?* Savel thought almost angrily as he gathered the shivering scrap into his arms. As if in answer, the harsh squawking cry of a Kylaki sounded very close as it rose into the sky. The sehlat cub buried itself deeper into the Elder's flowing robes.

"You have cheated him of his prey," Savel said to the cub and raised an eyebrow as a small pink tongue licked his chin as if to say 'Thank you.'

He carried the cub inside and called to the other Elders. They stood around discussing the matter as Savel dressed the wounds on its back, using a special salve known only to the inhabitants of the Sho-Lann that was made of herbs. One by one the Elders went to their appointed tasks and Savel took the cub to his room. Realising that it would be suffering from shock, he made up a bed for it with a piece of old robe. He then filled a water-jar from the hot spring and placed it in the bedding. The sehlat cub curled into a ball and fell asleep.

In the days that followed, the cub would not be left alone, but followed Savel everywhere and the Elders soon became accustomed to the familiar sight of Savel with the cub at his heels or sitting quietly at his feet. Savel realised that the cub had been used to the company of Vulcans; someone, somewhere, had obviously kept it as a pet. He grew fonder of the little creature as the days passed into weeks.

Isolated as they were, the Elders of the Sho-Lann still liked to keep in touch with the outside world. One room on the highest part of the ancient fortress housed their communications equipment, among the most sophisticated in the whole of Vulcan, its range almost limitless. At certain times, the Elders gathered in this room to listen to news from outside. Savel sat down, the cub at his feet as the Senior Elder present pressed the 'operate' switch and left the computer to search out any news from the cities beyond.

Savel listened to several broadcasts, the sehlat cub asleep at his feet. "The Vulcan Diplomatic Centre the Elder next to him stated as Ambassador Sarek appeared on the screen. The cub leaped to its feet, yelping furiously and dashed towards the console, paws scrabbling to find a hold on the smooth surface. It clawed its way upwards towards the screen with the image and voice of Ambassador Sarek. The Elders watched in something very close to amazement as the cub crooned in delight, rubbing its head against the screen. When the broadcast ended and the image faded, the room was filled with the cub's pitiful wails. He scrabbled back and forth, trying to reach the back of the screen where he thought Sarek was hiding. Savel tried to lift the cub down and could not help a grimace of pain as it snarled and sank its tiny, but very sharp, teeth into his arm, drawing blood. When he set it down, it ran round the console, howling and trying to find the owner of the much-loved voice.

"Obviously the Ambassador is known to our little friend here." Savel turned to the rest of the Elders. "I suggest we contact the Diplomatic Centre.

Sarek showed no sign of surprise as an aide came to his office and told him the Elders of the Sho-Lann wished to speak to him. Savel appeared on the screen with the sehlat cub in his arms, firmly restrained. He explained the most unusual circumstances of its arrival and its behaviour when Sarek appeared on the screen. "We therefore presumed that he belongs to you."

"He does indeed." Sarek raised an eyebrow. "He went missing some weeks ago, and a search proved negative. We assumed he had either gone back to the hills or had met with some misfortune. With your permission, I will collect him."

"Permission granted. The Elders of the Sho-Lann welcome you. Live long and prosper, Sarek of Vulcan." Savel turned away, his heart heavy. He would miss the little sehlat cub which had provided him with constant companionship in the past weeks. *Illogical! He does not belong to me. I cannot keep him!*

Sarek wondered at the cub's ability to survive the many dangers while still so young. The aircar flew on, mile after mile of desolation ahead as the Sas-a-Shar seemed endless. At last he reached the L-Langdon Mountains and the Sho-Lann, perched on a rocky plateau high among the peaks.

"Welcome, Ambassador." Savel greeted the tall figure as he stepped from the aircar. Faint memories began to return as Sarek followed the

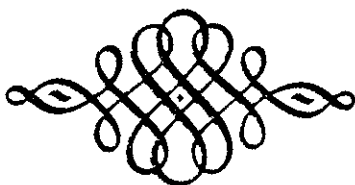


Elder into the imposing building. Memories of his own stay in the Sho-Lann as a student... the austerity, the lectures and strict discipline... His reverie was rudely interrupted by a little furry ball hurtling towards him.

"Steady, I-Chaya!" he cautioned as the cub clawed its way up the legs of his desert soft-suit.

"We knew he was yours," Savel watched the delighted capering of the little creature. Now there could be no doubt.

Some hours later, Sarek said his farewells to the Elders and started the journey back to ShiKahr. As he manoeuvred the aircar between the high peaks, the shadowy forms of the Kylakii wheeled above them, their shrill cries echoing. I-Chaya whimpered and pushed his nose into Sarek's hand. The corners of Sarek's mouth twitched in what looked suspiciously like a smile as he remembered Amanda's Earth saying about 'the one that got away'. "You have proved the fact," he said out loud as the warm tongue licked his hand.



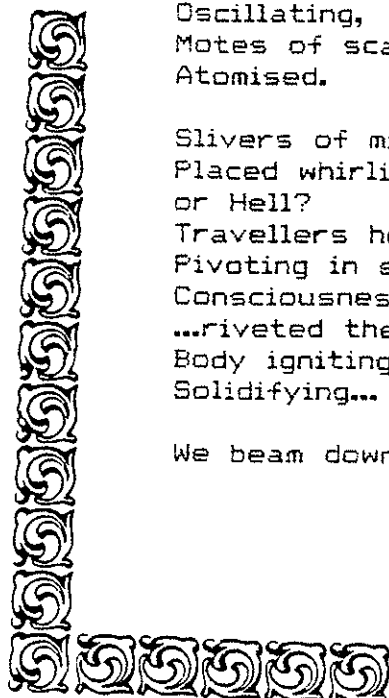
## TRAVELLERS

Synthesising,  
Spiralling forth in pillars of light,  
Incandescent,  
Gold shimmering statuettes,  
Oscillating,  
Motes of scattering sparks,  
Atomised.

Slivers of micro-humanity,  
Placed whirling in the heart of Heaven  
or Hell?  
Travellers held in a lifeless void,  
Pivoting in eternity,  
Consciousness gains momentum, Soul entering body,  
...riveted there by invisible hands.  
Body igniting into tangible life,  
Solidifying... Born again...

We beam down.

Gladys Oliver



# ONE ALONE

Sheryl Peterson

"Jim - you will be killed - just like Decker!"

My words came automatically, the anxiety in them naked, my Vulcan reserve banished for the moment before this sudden (Yes, I admit it!) fear... for you.

If I could only see your face at this crucial moment, it might strengthen my resolve and let me sway you, I tell myself, searching the viewscreen as if my eyes could pierce the leagues of space that separate us. But the Constellation's shattered shell is not in view, only the Planet Killer.

It waits out there... as it waited for Decker.

Undoubtedly he was a courageous man, yet he died for nothing, insanity and grief forcing him to purge his guilt in the fires of the thing which killed his crew.

But you, who are my Captain...

You would take the Constellation now, and follow his path, trusting only to our skill to pull you back at the moment of death.

*Jim... No... I beg!* My Vulcan and my Human halves both cry out silently. *Do not do this thing!*

But, of course, I cannot say it. If I were with you, to stand by your side in my rightful place as we faced this last danger, together as we have always been, somehow it would not matter so much if we met death. But to have you go alone...

I shield myself once more in logic, my arguments urgent now, but you will not be persuaded against it, when it may well be our only chance. Unfortunately, there is logic in your decision also.

Galaxies have died. Planets are dying even now in the maw of this thing. It must indeed be stopped, for all we hold dear lies before it.

*But not like this... at the price of all that I hold most valued!* I plead silently, without hope now, for I know you *will* do this thing even if only to avenge your friend.

I can only obey orders and watch silently as you risk your life yet again... but this time without me!

I have never felt so alone before. I wish, illogically, that I could look once more upon your face, but even that is denied me, and Vulcan control must sheathe the turmoil within me as I do what I must to guard your ship against your return.

Out there the Constellation moves forward like a crippled thing, carrying you to what may well be your death, and I can only sit and

watch...

One alone, in a ship full of people who suddenly no longer even seem to exist...

Such is the emptiness of my heart.

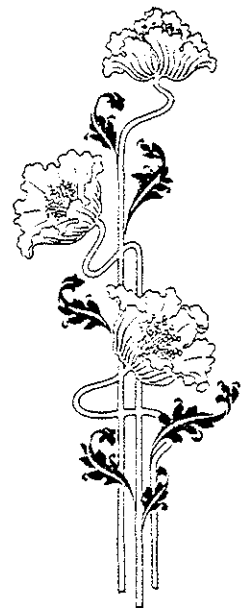


# The SPIRIT of CAMELOT

Back many, many centuries  
When life was in the dark,  
One man had a special vision  
That lit a fiery spark.  
King Arthur was that man -  
The vision, The Round Table,  
When gallant men, whate'er their creed  
Who were pure, and strong, and able,  
United as one family  
To fight for justice and the right -  
And that special vision of justice  
Shone brightly, day and night;  
Shone clearly to us down the centuries  
Through myth and legend and story  
So that all mankind whoe'er they be  
Would be inspired by the life and the glory.

Star Trek is our future Camelot,  
Peopled with a king, magician and knights -  
For 'Excalibur' read 'Enterprise' -  
The tool to change wrongs to rights;  
King Arthur is Gene Roddenberry,  
The man with that special vision;  
And Lancelot must be James T. Kirk,  
Fulfilling his duties with precision.  
And who do you think is Merlin?  
Why, Mr. Spock, of course!  
He has his own kind of magic  
But triumphs through logic, not force!

And all Trekkers firmly believe  
In this vision of our future tomorrow  
When famine and wars and killing are over  
And there will be no more sorrow.  
Yes, every Trekker should proclaim it,  
Shout it loud lest it be forgot;  
For in the heart of every Star Trekker  
Burns the Spirit of Camelot!



Linda Wood

# a MOMENT of TIME

Sheryl Peterson

"No, Jim!"

Your voice spears out... pinning me where I stand, like a hunter's shaft transfixing the fleeing prey, so that I hang suspended... watching with that terrible clarity only moments of peril can bring to the senses.

She is pinned also... for aeon-long seconds... like a bright moth mesmerised by the headlights that bear down on her like the wheels of fate.

I could save her!

If I ran and leaped, I could bear her free as my heart screams that I must...

But you say 'No, Jim!' - the urgency in your voice a naked thing, the most startling for having been unsheathed from your scabbarded reserve. And my mind says *Hold!*, torn between you both.

She I love...

I could marry her, and give her sons perhaps, with a whole new world before us... before me...

But you...

You are more to me than even that... my guardian, my sword, the hawk on my glove, my other self...

One of you I must betray... but... which? Either way, a world dies - for me.

But years of being a Starship Captain have taught me too well that I can have no wants - can fulfil no secret needs. My ship reaches out to me across the entrapping years, speaking with *your* voice as you cry 'No, Jim!' and I turn blindly, in a moment of time, to clasp McCoy to me as he goes to rush forward... his steps sure where mine falter... my strength the strength of despair!

It is over in seconds. A dream dies that was never mine anyway, and everything goes back to what it will be.

McCoy turns on me, shrugging me off like a leper, his eyes blue blades of accusation, stabbing my cringing heart.

But *your* eyes, Spock... Those dark, all-seeing eyes that always *did* see through me...

They seek mine and reveal that you *can* feel pity. For me, and for her.

You understand, Spock. You always do. But does Edith Keeler?

I can never know...



# A CHAPTER of ACCIDENTS

Liz Butler

Let me state, right here and now, that I didn't ask to go tramping off into the wide blue yonder with Jim and Spock. I'd have been quite happy to stay on the ship for once. I mean, miles and miles of uninhabited jungle is hardly my idea of a fun-filled vacation.

"No, thanks," I said when Jim casually let drop the fact that he and Spock were beaming down to Deimos for a couple of days and, equally casually, invited me along. "I'm gettin' too old for playing boy scouts. The thought of spending two or three nights in a tent doesn't exactly fill me with joyful anticipation. No, you two go play explorers, and I'll just relax up here in comfort."

"Aw, come on, Bones," Jim insisted. "It'll do you good. You could do with some sunshine. Just think, a whole planet with not a single living soul to bother us."

I was adamant. "Yeah, that's what bothers me. Haven't you learned by now that there's always a serpent in Eden?"

"Bones, you're being too pessimistic. Deimos's been surveyed several times over the last week, and none of the landing parties have had even an inkling of anything untoward. It's perfectly safe."

The number of times I've heard those very words. I guess, according to the law of averages, someday we might actually find a planet where they'll be true... but not this time, for me at least! Foolishly, against my better judgement, I allowed myself to be persuaded.

When my scattered molecules had successfully reassembled themselves, the first thing that struck me was... a coconut. True! I'd taken one step forward, after ascertaining that the various parts of my anatomy were indeed in the right places - well, you never know, the transporter has been known to malfunction - when *WHAM!*

"Wha... what happened?" I awoke to find myself lying flat on my back.

The concerned face above me split into a relieved grin. "How do you feel? That coconut gave you quite a wallop."

I sat up, gingerly lifting a hand to a rapidly rising lump on the back of my head. All my preconceived notions concerning the transporter came back with a vengeance. "Damn fool notion! That's the last time I use that infernal device. I *knew* I should've stayed on the ship!"

My mood was not helped by my revered Captain collapsing into hysterical laughter. "It's all right for you to laugh. You haven't got a lump the size of an egg on the back of your head. I told you I wasn't cut out for the outdoor life!"

"S.. sorry, Bones," he spluttered. "I know it's not funny, but... well, it's not every day that someone gets poleaxed by a coconut!"

I threw a black look at him as he was seized by another paroxysm of laughter. "Your concern for my welfare does you credit, Captain," I observed sarcastically.

With a gigantic effort he pulled his face back into a semblance of control, marred by the persistent twitch at the corner of his mouth. "I'm sorry. Seriously, are you all right?"

I probed the painful area cautiously. "Yeah, I think so. No bones broken - no thanks to that damned transporter!"

Spock, who'd remained on the sidelines, so to speak, now decided to shove in his two-pennyworth. "Doctor, you are being, as usual, unreasonable. The transporter had nothing whatever to do with your... accident."

"Oh no? Then why did it put us slapbang right under a... a... coconut tree? And what caused that... coconut to drop at the precise moment we beamed down?"

"An unfortunate coincidence," was the placid reply.

"Well, sure it was unfortunate, but coincidence? Don't give me that! I've always said that transporter's dangerous. It's not natural. I keep saying - "

"Yes, Doctor," interrupted Spock with a long-suffering sigh. "We are only too aware of what you keep saying. Every time you use the transporter we are treated to the same little ritual. I would have thought that by now even you would have conceded that the process is quite safe."

I saw red. Not unusual when I'm thrown into close contact with this particular colleague. "Oh, yeah? What about - "

"Gentlemen, please." Jim held up both hands. "We are here to enjoy ourselves - relax - have fun." He glared meaningfully at both of us. "So - stow it!"

I opened my mouth for an indignant retort, but the words died on my lips at the look on Jim's face. I gathered as much dignity as I could muster after being zapped by a coconut. "Yes, sir." Getting to my feet, I turned my back on my now grinning Captain, and took a few steps forward. A sharp jab in my ankle made me let out a yelp of pain.

"Now what's the matter?" Jim rushed to my side.

"Something bit me!" I could see Jim trying to suppress a smile. "I tell you, something *bit* me! Look!" I bent to roll up my trouser leg. There, sure enough, was a row of tiny tooth marks. We both stared at them, thoughts of poison sacs and such-like immediately coming to the fore.

"What was it? Did you see it?" Jim's voice was serious.

Any reply I might have made was forestalled by the dry, calm tones of our First Officer. "Dr. McCoy, if you will insist on indiscriminately stepping on the small fauna of this planet, you must expect to be bitten on occasion."

I glared at him furiously. "Is that all you can think about at a time like this? There could be poison surging through my system right now, and



all you're concerned about is the fact that I stepped on some 'poor, defenceless, creature!' Doesn't it bother you that I could be dying right in front of your eyes, this very minute?" A trifle melodramatic, I admit, but I was rattled - and anyway, it *might* have been true!

He walked slowly across to join us. "No, because you are not. Here is the culprit, and I assure you, it does not secrete a deadly poison through its teeth." He held up a small brown animal that looked for all the world like a Terran squirrel. "Several of the survey team have encountered these creatures, and they are completely harmless unless provoked. In fact, they are quite friendly," As if to prove his words, the little perisher sat quite unconcerned in his palm, nonchalantly washing its face.

Jim reached out and tickled its ears. "Cute, isn't it? Come on, Bones, say you're sorry and make friends."

I eyed the creature dubiously. It *seemed* harmless enough on inspection, and it certainly appeared to be enjoying the attention being bestowed upon it. I approached warily and tentatively extended a hand. Some day I'll learn! It took one good long sniff at my finger, promptly sank razor-sharp teeth into the end of it, then leaped onto the nearest branch, scuttling up it, scolding loudly. I snatched my hand back hurriedly. For something that small, it sure packed a punch! Finger throbbing, I stared upwards into the leaves.

"Did you see that? *Did you?* Harmless my foot!"

Since he had once again succumbed to hysterics, Jim's reply was completely incomprehensible and I turned my back on him with disgust. "Vicious little horror!" I muttered, examining my wounded appendage. Whether my comment was intended for the squirrel or my unsympathetic Captain is a matter for conjecture. Spock tactfully assumed the former.

"That's just the point, Doctor. They are not vicious at all."

"It *bit* me! *Twice!*"

"Yes," mused Spock thoughtfully. "The creature does show a remarkable degree of intelligence."

I was annoyed... just a little. "Why, you... you... " I restrained myself from punching him in the mouth with considerable difficulty. "Just *what* do you mean by that?"

Jim looked up, eyes streaming. "Yeah, Spock, aren't you being just a little bit insulting?"

"Insulting?" He managed to look affronted. "Not at all. I was merely pointing out that the animal was able to differentiate between us, singling out the source of his earlier attack, and retaliating."

"Attack?" I yelled. "I didn't attack the little horror! I didn't even *see* the damned thing!"

"Nevertheless, you stood on it, thus causing pain to which it, quite naturally, reacted. As you perceived, it accepted the Captain and myself quite calmly, but it recognised yourself as the perpetrator of pain... hence, it bit you."

He had a point - not much of one, but a point nevertheless. I turned towards the tree among whose leaves the little... animal... had vanished, and executed an elaborate bow. "Well, pardon *me*, I'm sure! I'm *so* sorry!"

My temper, none too good at the best of times, was now decidedly frayed, and I turned without another word and picked up my pack. The others also collected their packs and we set off in silence, led, as usual on these trips, by Spock.

I must admit that the place had a sort of wild beauty and my foul mood gradually dissipated as I found myself admiring the exotic vegetation and occasional glimpses of the local wildlife. To my relief, we didn't come across any more of my 'squirrels'. I'm ashamed to confess that I had developed a definite antipathy towards those 'harmless little creatures' from which I have still not totally recovered. After a while, I felt myself under close scrutiny and looked up to meet Jim's eyes. He grinned widely, and almost unthinkingly, I grinned back.

"That's better. We're here to enjoy ourselves, after all. Aren't you glad you came? This is the ideal place to get away from it all, isn't it?"

Personally, I wasn't any too sure, but maybe that was due to my inauspicious introduction to Deimos. Anyway, Jim's enthusiasm was infectious, so I decided to reserve judgement for the time being. "Yeah, I suppose so. It does have its good points, I guess."

Jim slapped me on the back. "See! I told you so! It's about time you took a dose of your own medicine and got out into real air for a change."

Actually, the 'real air' was beginning to get me down. It was too hot for a start, and with the abundance of plant life, just a trifle too humid for my liking, but I wisely refrained from comment and obligingly fell into step with Jim. We ambled along in companionable silence, our Vulcan friend forging on ahead and taking an acute interest in everything in sight.

As we travelled, the wild semi-jungle gradually gave way to more open grassland, considerably reducing the humidity, for which I at least was thankful. I was even more thankful when Jim called a halt for lunch.

"How much further are we going?" I asked as I sank gratefully to the short, scrubby grass.

"See that crag?"

I followed Jim's pointing finger, and my heart sank to my boots. "You mean... that mountain?" Realisation dawned. "Jim, you don't mean... you can't... 'a couple of days camping and relaxation,' you said. "Mountaineering was *not* on the agenda! Besides, it's *miles* away!"

"One point two miles, Doctor, to be precise. And it can hardly be described as a 'mountain'."

"It's okay, Bones," Jim assured me. "It looks worse than it is, really, and you get a marvellous view from the top, according to the men who did the survey in this area. Bones, would I ask you to undertake anything dangerous?"

"It wouldn't be the first time," I grumbled, making a mental resolution to discover just who did the survey in this area. Their next medicals would give them a day to remember! I looked again at the mountain, then back to Jim's smiling face.

"Trust me."

"Huh." I was not convinced, but gave in gracefully. This was definitely not a fun trip! Lounging, propped up on an elbow, I looked

about me, munching idly on a food concentrate bar. Come to think of it, there's not much else you can do with a food concentrate bar; they're certainly not processed with the object of actually being enjoyed! "Y'know," I ventured after a while, "this place kinda grows on you." I wasn't ready to commit myself, but I thought some overture of approval was due. Jim beamed at me with that 'I told you so' expression on his face, then lay back staring up at the blue sky.

My eyes ranged slowly round, from the thick jungle some distance behind us now, over low hills dotted thickly with clumps of trees, to rest unwillingly on the 'mountain' up which I was apparently going to be compelled to climb. From this distance it looked... picturesque. Sort of orangy, with clumps of dark greenery scattered freely over the surface. My gaze travelled up the steep slopes to the peak, which was temporarily obscured by a low, pinkish cloud. *Very storybookish*, was my immediate thought. Nice to look at, but going up it was quite another matter. Resolutely, I averted my gaze. Time enough to worry about that later... when I had no choice. I turned my head slowly, my eyes moving on to a large expanse of the most beautiful green grass I have ever seen - I mean green, the sort of green that you don't normally come across outside of a child's paintbox. Squinting my eyes against the sun, I could just make out a distant sparkle of water.

"Look at that grass," I said. "Have you ever seen such green grass?"

Jim and Spock looked across to where I was pointing. "Mmm," murmured Jim lazily. "Very nice."

"Very nice?" I echoed. "Very nice? It's beautiful! Anyone fancy coming to have a closer look?"

Spock cast a critical eye over the stretch of grass. "I wouldn't advise it," he replied enigmatically.

"Oh, and why not?" I had risen to my feet and now looked down at him challengingly. "I would have thought that you, especially, would be curious about such a spectacle of nature. Where's your famous scientific curiosity?"

Spock opened his mouth to answer, but Jim waved him to silence. "Let him go, Spock. You know what he's like once he gets an idea into his head."

"But Captain, I really feel - "

"Spock!"

I looked suspiciously from one to the other. "What are you two cooking up between you? Why do I suddenly feel uneasy?"

Jim looked up innocently. "Uneasy? Whatever for?"

"I don't know, but... I don't trust you. You've got that look in your eye."

He grinned and lay back, eyes closed. "Oh, well, please yourself. Don't go. It makes no difference to me."

I hesitated, watching him for a few seconds, then turned to regard my intended objective. The scintillating sparkle of water beckoned invitingly. *What harm could there be?* I thought. *It's only grass, after all.*

Mind made up, I started out purposefully. It was further than I thought, and after a few minutes I looked back over my shoulder, smiling in satisfaction as I espied my two companions following at a distance. So much for their apparent uninterest - I knew they'd come. The short, scrubby grass I was traversing gave way to the brilliant green that had attracted my attention. It had lost none of its vibrant colour over the distance I had covered; in fact, it was now even more glaringly green than before, if that were possible. I advanced a few yards to gaze out over the water. From this point, I was able to establish that it was in fact a lake, shining like a mirror in the bright sunlight. Not a ripple disturbed the smooth surface, in which was reflected, with perfect clarity, the trees along the opposite shore. I sighed in absolute bliss, and turned my head to regard my companions.

That's when I noticed that something was wrong. Under normal circumstances I have to look up at Spock - most people do - but Jim and I are much the same height. Now, for some strange reason, I found I had to look up at both of them. It was most disconcerting, and I stared, perplexed.

"Either I'm shrinking, or you two are getting taller," I observed. "Which is it?"

Spock stood, arms folded, and answered quite calmly. "Neither, Dr, McCoy. Perhaps you ought to look down."

I didn't like the way he said that. An icy chill, a familiar enough visitor by now, ran up my spine, and I was loathe to follow his suggestion. I swallowed and, taking my courage in both hands, looked down. It wasn't a pretty sight, I can tell you! Even as I watched, my legs were slowly disappearing beneath the surface of the grass. Hastily, I lifted a foot... or at least, that's what I attempted to do. My foot wouldn't budge! I was stuck fast! Frantically, I swung my upper body to face my companions. They stood regarding me with about as much concern as that damned squirrel!

"Well, don't just stand there, *do something!*" I yelled. I again attempted to lift a foot. It felt like I was trying to walk through treacle. The movement made me lose my balance and I pitched forward, flinging out my arms instinctively to break my fall. Much good it did me! My hands sank straight under, and I found myself examining the grass at very close quarters. Cursing and spluttering, I struggled upright and glared at my 'friends'. "Well?" I demanded scathingly. "Is *someone* going to get me out of here?"

They looked at each other, shrugged philosophically, then moved quickly to haul me out of the morass. Once my feet were extracted, it was a comparatively easy matter to scramble to firm ground, and I rounded on both of them.

"You *knew*, didn't you?"

Spock met my gaze unflinchingly. "I suspected as much."

"Then why the hell didn't you *tell* me? Why did you have to go and let me make a fool of myself?"

He sighed. "In the first place, I doubt you would have believed me. In the second place, even if you had believed me, you would still have wanted to come down to investigate the lake, and... "

"In the third place, I told him not to."

I stared at Jim. "You... you told him... " I took a deep breath.

"What the hell for? So you could have a good laugh at my expense? Well, thank you. Thank you very much! I'm sure you won't mind if I go back to the ship. I've had enough!"

I was hurt - I mean, all joking aside, I was hurt to think that Jim would play such a trick on me, especially after what had already happened to me on this particular trip. I turned away and unclipped my communicator, flipping open the lid. A hand closed over mine, and I raised my head to meet the worried gaze of my commanding officer.

"Bones! Bones, I'm sorry, really I am. It was a stupid thing to do, and I apologise. Please, don't go back to the ship. It'll ruin everything."

I said nothing. There was such sincerity in his voice, and I guess I knew he didn't really want to hurt me - it was just his irrepressible sense of fun. My anger evaporated as quickly as it had arisen, and I stared down at my soggy feet. He sighed, releasing my hand. "I'm sorry, Bones. If you really want to go back to the ship, I won't stop you. Only... Oh, hell, I don't know why I keep doing these stupid things!"

"I do," I stated with mock severity, trying desperately to still the laughter bubbling up inside me as the hilarity of the situation finally got to me. "Because you're a twelve-year-old boy trapped in a man's body, that's why!"

My voice must have sounded sterner than I thought, because he looked at me in obvious embarrassment. "I'm really sorry," he said again, earnestly. "Please forgive me?"

I grabbed his arm. "Don't be so bloody stupid! Of course I forgive you. Don't I always?"

He looked at me uncertainly, and I could restrain myself no longer. The mental image of myself, slowly sinking into the marsh whilst unconcernedly staring out over the lake, was too much, and I started to chuckle. Once started, it was impossible to stop... and it was infectious. Within seconds we were both helpless with laughter, sitting shaking on the grass like couple of five-year-olds. God knows what Spock thought of us! When I had recovered enough to give the matter any attention, I looked round. He was standing, back against a tree, arms folded, regarding us in patient resignation. I grinned at him. "Come on, Spock, don't you think it's just a little bit funny? Even I can see the funny side now, though I'll admit I was damned annoyed at first."

His reply was typical and expected. "No, Doctor. Unlike Humans, I fail to see the hilarity in another's misfortunes. I assure you it was not my idea to allow you to be humiliated in such a way."

"No, I can believe that," I allowed. "But you went along with it anyway. Why?" He was flummoxed, I could tell, and I relented. "Never mind, don't answer that. It doesn't matter." I changed the subject abruptly. "Didn't someone say something about climbing a mountain?"

Back once more to his normal, infuriating self, Spock corrected me. "No, Doctor, that was *your* interpretation. In reality, we are going to ascend a low promontory from which we should gain a panoramic view of the surrounding country."

"Same thing," I countered, rising to my feet and reaching down a hand to Jim. A raised eyebrow was my only answer.

Harmony restored, we collected our packs and set off towards the

aforementioned 'mountain'. I've often heard the expression 'squelching along' - now I know what it means. Every time I put my foot to the ground, there was a decided 'squelch'. I felt such a fool, and Jim's smothered chuckles did nothing to improve that unhappy state of affairs. As the mountain loomed nearer, my flagging spirits plummeted even further. No-one had said anything about mountain climbing whilst urging me to come down here. If I'd had the slightest inkling... *Oh, well, never mind*, I told myself. *Grin and bear it. It may not be so bad.* I almost had myself believing it too - until we came to a halt at the foot of said edifice.

*No way!* I thought. *There's no way they're dragging me up there.* I stepped back a pace.

"I thought you said this wasn't a mountain? It's huge!"

Jim stood back and looked up... and up... and up. "Well... it's... it's..."

"See?" I shouted triumphantly. "Even you are having second thoughts! I could see Jim was a little nonplussed, so quickly followed my advantage. "Come on, Jim, we don't *have* to go up the damned thing, do we? I mean, it's not absolutely essential, is it?"

He was wavering and my spirits revived somewhat, only to be dashed by everyone's favourite Vulcan. I might have known that *he'd* stick his oar in.

"Gentlemen, you are being too defeatist. Remember, the survey team in this area accomplished the ascent with no difficulty. Why then should we not, also?"

Now, if anything's guaranteed to ensure that Jim does something difficult, it's being told that someone else has done it before him. I resigned myself to the inevitable as Jim - predictably - said, "You're right, Spock. If they can do it, then we sure as hell can! Come on, gentlemen, up we go!"

Why can't certain interfering Vulcans learn to keep their big mouths shut? I threw an absolutely filthy look at Spock, which had absolutely no effect on *him*, but it made *me* feel better, then resolutely followed as Jim and Spock started up the lower slope.

It was fairly easy going at first, and I shoved my earlier misgivings to the back of my mind, concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other. Alas, those misgivings soon resurfaced, as I found myself scrabbling on loose stones and grabbing at lumps of rock and clumps of grass. Clinging precariously to a low shrub, I yelled, "Hey, shouldn't we be roped together or something? I thought that was the first rule of mountain climbing!"

A voice floated down to me. "It is, Doctor. But, as I pointed out to you earlier, this is not a mountain. However, if you are experiencing difficulty, perhaps you would like one of us to come down to assist you?"

I peered upwards, searching for the owner of that patronising voice. Come down to assist me, indeed! Honestly, he made me feel like a small child... or an old man. And I'm a little too close to the latter for comfort. "No, thanks." I yelled back. "I can manage."

Again that disembodied voice. "Very well, if you're sure you do not require assistance. Please be careful."

I fumed inwardly, nursing my damaged pride. Maybe those two *did* regard me as an old man who had to be helped over the rough bits. I'd show



them! With renewed vigour, I continued the ascent. Maybe if I'd paid a little less attention to salvaging my pride and a little more attention to the job in hand, I'd have made it unscathed. However, it's very easy to be wise after the event.

Muttering furiously to myself, I fairly ran up that slope. I reckon I must have got about halfway, when I trod on some loose pebbles and completely lost my footing. As I slid backwards, scrabbling frantically for a handholds, all thought of pride fled from my panic-stricken mind. I yelled for help.

They say that when you're drowning, your whole life flashes before your eyes. Let me tell you that doesn't only apply to drowning - try falling down a mountain! It wouldn't have been so bad if they'd been nice visions, but no, not me. Every nasty, sneaky trick I'd ever played on anybody seemed to whizz past me at frightening speed. The final retribution! Just as I'd convinced myself that my end had come at last, my flailing hands closed round a branch and I grasped it instinctively, the sudden cessation of downward movement almost jerking my arms out of their sockets. I gritted my teeth together against the pain, and hung on grimly.

"Bones! Bones, are you all right? Where are you?"

"Jim!" I croaked. This wouldn't do! Clearing my throat, I tried again. "I'm down here, Jim!"

The relief was evident in his voice. "Thank God! Hang on, Bones, we're coming. Just hang on!"

"I am! I am!" What else did he expect me to do? Taking a firm grip on the branch, I kicked out below me trying to find some sort of foothold. The slope was almost vertical where I had fallen, and my feet encountered nothing but empty space. With extreme caution I released the pressure of the fingers of one hand and moved it a little further along the branch, following equally carefully with the other hand. Inch by slow inch I moved nearer to the cliff face, until at last my searching feet made contact with something solid and I pushed myself up so that I could wrap my arms around the branch, hugging it gratefully. The sounds of movement above me were getting nearer and I relaxed a little, secure in the knowledge that rescue was close at hand. I closed my eyes for a few seconds, and when I opened them again I was confronted by...

"Oh, no," I groaned aloud. "That's *all* I need!"

There, right in front of me, staring with undisguised curiosity, was a 'squirrel'. I stared right back. "Er... Hi, there," I ventured. "Nice of you to drop in." It sat unmoving, its little eyes fixed unwaveringly on my face scant inches away. "Go away," I hissed. "Shoo!"

It didn't move a muscle, just sat there like it was carved out of stone. I sighed. "Okay, okay, have it your own way. I'm in no position to argue with you. Do your worst!" I held its gaze challengingly. For long seconds neither of us even blinked, then with lightning speed the creature moved in for the kill. Before I had time to prepare myself, it launched forward, deposited a raspy lick on the end of my nose, then shot up the branch and out of sight. I stared after it, letting out the breath I had unconsciously been holding. "Well!" I exclaimed. "Would you believe..." Spock, as usual, had been proved right... So what's new?

Crisis over, I returned my attention to my unenviable situation. Where the hell were they anyway? I twisted my head to squint up the slope. I was just about to open my mouth to yell when into my line of vision came a boot, then another boot, then a leg...

"And about time, too," I exclaimed crossly. "What took you so long? I've been hanging around here for hours!"

"Hardly that, Doctor. Four point two minutes, to be precise."

Damn him! He wasn't even breathing hard. "Well, it *feels* like hours," I countered sullenly. "My arms have gone numb!"

"Understandable," Spock answered matter-of-factly. "Continued pressure on the muscles and tendons of the upper arms and shoulders invariably results..."

"Spare me the lecture, smartass! Just get me out of here, will you?"

"That was my intention."

I clamped my lips firmly together and waited, forcing myself to calm down. After all, there was no sense in biting the hand that came to rescue you, was there? After what seemed an eternity, I felt the welcome strength of Spock's encircling arm as he lifted me bodily from my precarious position. Waiting hands grasped my legs, and my aching body was hefted onto a wide ledge nearby. The abrupt release of pressure was almost as painful as the ordeal of hanging there, my arms and hands being immediately assailed by excruciating pins and needles.

Fortunately for me, both Jim and Spock were much too relieved to deliver a lecture on false heroics. Jim hovered over me anxiously. "Are you all right, Bones? You gave us a hell of a fright there!"

I flexed my shoulders and wrists slowly. It hurt like blazes, but at least I could ascertain that nothing was broken or dislocated. "Yeah, I'm okay. Just sore," I assured him.

"I'm not surprised," he observed feelingly. "It's a miracle you didn't break an arm or a leg at the very least! What happened?"

"I slipped on some damned pebbles!" I grated out through clenched teeth, whilst I painfully attempted to massage some feeling back into my arm. My shoulders ached abominably.

Spock knelt by my side. "If you will permit?" He waited for my somewhat wary nod of assent before commencing an expert massage of my shoulders and upper arms. For someone of such phenomenal strength he could be surprisingly gentle at times such as this.

At length Jim put up a hand to shade his eyes and looked up at the cliff face. "What do you think? Should we go on, or start back down again? We're only about halfway, so I don't see that it makes much difference."

I wasn't having that! Whatever either of them said now, they'd come down here with the express intention of climbing this rock, and I had no intention of being the cause of their abandoning the idea. Don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting for one minute that either of them would attach any blame to me - we've all known each other too long and too well for that. But the plain and simple fact remained that if we turned back now, it'd be solely because of me, and we would *all* be aware of that fact, no matter how much we tried to make light of it. I got rather shakily to my feet, smiling my thanks at Spock before facing Jim.

"If you think I'm trailing all the way up here, just so's we can start back down again because of a little fall, you can think again! I'm perfectly all right, so let's just keep going, shall we? I *would* rather

get to the top before nightfall. The thought of mountain climbing in the dark doesn't exactly appeal to me!"

Jim looked at me doubtfully, glanced up at the cliff, exchanged a look with Spock, then returned his gaze to me. I met his eyes defiantly, daring him to suggest that maybe I wasn't up to it after all. It must have worked because he just shrugged and grinned. "O.K. - if you're sure you're all right, we'll carry on."

"Course I'm all right! Come on, let's get a move on. I'm as anxious as you are to get to the top of this thing."

All right, all right, so I lied. It's no big deal. What's a little white lie between friends? Besides, both Jim and Spock knew I was lying through my teeth, so it didn't really count. Without further ado, we recommenced the climb, and this time I made damned sure I watched every step I took, pride or no pride. We reached the top without further mishap. I wish I could say that it was worth the effort, just for the view from the top... but we couldn't see a blasted thing! During our passage upwards, the sun had been slowly dropping lower and lower, and by the time we eventually made it, it was already dusk. However, we were up!

"All in all, it's been quite a day, hasn't it?"

I glanced across to where Jim lay sprawled by the camp fire. "Yeah, I guess you could say that," I agreed cautiously. If he started cataloguing my little string of disasters, so help me...

"Pity we got up here too late to appreciate the view," he mused, staring into the flames. "If only we..." He stopped and I waited with baited breath. *Here it comes*, I thought. "If only," he continued, carefully avoiding my gaze, "we'd started out a little earlier... If I hadn't overslept, we'd have been down here a good hour sooner."

I'll say this for Jim, he can be very diplomatic. We both knew very well that he hadn't overslept, because he'd come and turfed me out of bed, just in case I changed my mind. Wisely, I kept my mouth shut, mutely accepting the proffered olive branch.

"Besides, there is always tomorrow." This from Spock, who sat watching both of us carefully. "Sunrise is perhaps the best time to get one's first glimpse of a new world, is it not?"

Jim caught my eye and grinned. "Yeah, Spock, I think you could be right at that."

Good old Spock - the peacemaker. Well, he's had a lot of practice over the years, we Humans not exactly being renowned for our patience and understanding. He glanced from one of us to the other, then, satisfied that he'd averted any further hassle, rose to his feet. "I suggest, gentlemen, that we all get some rest if we intend to rise at dawn."

I was all too willing to fall in with that suggestion. Despite Spock's massage earlier, my tumble down the mountain had left its legacy of aches and pains - and the lump on my head from the encounter with the coconut didn't exactly help either.

Thankfully, I followed my friends into the tent, pulled off my clothes, and slithered into my sleeping bag. It was sheer heaven. I must have dropped off almost immediately, because that's the last I remember

until...

"Come on, wake up, Bones! Rise and shine! The sun's coming up and it's going to be a lovely day."

I don't know about you, but I'm really not at my best first thing in the morning. I dragged open bleary eyes, took one cautious look out of the open tent flap, and retreated into the warmth of my sleeping bag. "Go away, Jim! It's still dark! Can't a fellow get a little sleep around here? We are supposed to be on shore leave, y'know."

"All the more reason for getting out of bed. You can sleep any time." He sounded disgustingly cheerful for the crack of dawn, and my poor tired brain cringed from his enthusiasm. "Come on! Out of that bed! That's an order!"

So saying, he whipped open my sleeping bag and dragged me bodily to a sitting position. I glared at him furiously, wrapping my arms around my shivering frame. "You can't order me to..."

"Who can't? I am your Captain..."

"Not down here you're not, my lad. This is shore leave, remember? I can stay here all day if I want to... I've half a mind to anyway, it's bloody freezing!"

The friendly grin slowly faded from his face and he got uncertainly to his feet. "Okay, suit yourself. See you later."

I sat there staring at his retreating back, toying with the idea of staying exactly where I was. It was a tempting thought, but...

I sighed. It was no good, my mood was irretrievably broken. Muttering dire threats against my Captain's person, I hurried into my clothes.

My spirits revived somewhat at the sight of the cheerful fire and the smell of hot coffee.

"Glad you decided to join us," ventured Jim as I hunched down in front of the fire, hands extended towards the blaze.

I restricted myself to a noncommittal grunt. The morning had started off badly enough without my getting into a fight. *Could you, I thought, get court-martialled for thumping a senior officer whilst on shore leave?* I decided it wasn't worth the risk - besides, he'd only thump me back and he's bigger than me! A cup of steaming coffee appeared at my hand, and I smiled at Spock gratefully. The very incongruity of this action struck me immediately. What the hell was wrong with me anyway? Here was I, sitting round a campfire with Jim Kirk and Spock in a complete reversal of their usual roles. How long was it, I reflected, since Spock had had to be a buffer between me and Jim? I couldn't even remember such a time and I pulled myself up sharply. Jim was my closest friend! So we didn't always see eye to eye, but then who does? What if he *had* had a good laugh at my expense yesterday? I'd have done the same if our positions had been reversed, wouldn't I? I looked across at the object of my thoughts. He sat, staring morosely into his coffee cup, and I came to a decision. I cleared my throat.

"Jim."

He raised his eyes to my face.

"Er... about yesterday. I'm sorry I let fly at you like that."

"You're sorry!" he exclaimed. "Bones, it was my fault. You were quite right. I acted like a stupid kid."

"No, Jim," I interrupted. "It's not just that - I'm talking about my whole attitude yesterday. I set out fully determined to find fault with everything, and boy, did I. Anyway, what I'm trying to say is... could we start again - forget yesterday altogether?"

A relieved smile lit up his face. "Sure, of course - only... please let me apologise again for my behaviour. It was unforgivable, and I ought to have had more sense." He grinned at me a little ruefully. "Guess I should have listened to Spock, huh?"

"Heaven forbid!" I exclaimed in mock horror. "If you go doing things like that, we'll be in more trouble than enough!"

Spock eyed me with an air of wounded dignity. "On the contrary, Doctor, if either of you condescended to listen to me occasionally we would all be saved a great deal of unnecessary inconvenience."

I beamed at him and gave a great inward sigh of relief. Things were back to normal between the three of us.

Breakfast over, Jim got to his feet. "Come on, you two. We've come all this way up, at considerable risk to life and limb, so I suppose we ought to take a look at the view."

I stood up, trying to appear enthusiastic. It wasn't easy. "O.K., lead on. We might as well go see what all the fuss was about."

We retraced our steps to the edge of the cliff. Steeling myself, I looked down and let out an involuntary gasp. The survey team hadn't exaggerated, the view was spectacular. As far as the eye could see, there were gently rolling hills and vast areas of thick forest. A river cut a wide blue swathe through the countryside over to our right, and, way over in the distance, slicing through dense jungle greenery, a sparkling waterfall fell sheer, hundreds of feet down. As we watched, the first rays of a new dawn bathed the breathtaking panorama in a warm, rosy glow, and all three of us stood entranced.

Jim was the first to break the silence. "It's beautiful," he breathed.

I nodded. "It sure is," I whispered, almost reverently. "I've never seen anything quite so... so..." I was lost for words. Don't look so surprised, it can happen to the best of us! I took a deep breath of the clear mountain air. "Thanks, Jim."

He looked at me, puzzlement in his eyes. "For what?"

"For browbeating me into coming along on this trip. This moment makes up for all the hassle of the last twenty-four hours... well, almost. I've never seen anything like it!"

Jim sank to the ground and sat gazing out over the vista spread before us. "Neither have I, Bones. Neither have I."

I moved to join him, settling myself comfortably, and glanced up at Spock, who still stood in silent contemplation. "You're very quiet, Spock."

Cat got your tongue?"

For once, he didn't rise to the bait. Without looking at me, he answered quietly, "No, Doctor, there simply isn't anything to say. Some things... some feelings... are beyond expression. There just aren't words to convey what I feel at this moment."

I stared at him, astounded. Spock, actually admitting to possessing feelings! And to me! That should have provided me with an ideal opportunity to pounce, but somehow I just couldn't find it in me to tease him at that juncture, the rapt expression on his austere countenance effectively silencing me. I must be getting soft in my old age. I smiled indulgently, and gave my undivided attention to the beauty of Deimos. Long minutes passed without a sound between us, the large orange sun slowly hitching itself up into the cloudless azure sky. At last, Jim murmured lazily, "I suppose we really ought to do something. I mean, we can't just sit here all morning... can we?"

I caught the tinge of wistfulness in his voice. Flopping down onto my stomach, I rested my chin on folded arms. "Why not? We came down here to relax, didn't we? We did precious little relaxing yesterday! I hereby prescribe a morning's relaxation, right here where we are. Any objections?"

I looked pointedly at our alien friend. For the second time that morning he surprised me. "An admirable suggestion, Dr. McCoy. I'm sure we would all benefit from the rest."

I grinned at Jim. "There now, Jim. You can't argue with *that*. If Spock agrees with me, it really *must* be a good idea!"

He smiled at Spock affectionately. "Yeah, Bones, I guess you're right." Sighing contentedly, he lay down alongside me, assuming a position flat on his stomach. Time ceased to have any meaning after a while and I guess I must have dozed off. I remember opening my eyes and noticing that Spock had followed our lead, and was lying propped against a boulder, his features relaxed but absorbed, and I closed my eyes again leaving him to his private meditation.

When I again became aware of my surroundings, the sun was high in the sky. I sat up, and my movement woke Jim, who stretched and yawned.

"Good grief, what time is it? I must have fallen asleep. Spock, why didn't you wake me?"

Spock inclined his head, an eyebrow on the rise. "For what purpose? We are on shore leave, and as you both were obviously in need of a period of complete relaxation, I saw no reason to disturb you."

I bristled. "I wasn't asleep!"

"No, Doctor?"

My eyes fell before his compelling gaze. "Well... maybe I did close my eyes for a while... but I wasn't asleep!"

"If you say so, Doctor."

I felt my temper rising again. That man really has an uncanny knack of getting right under my skin. I opened my mouth for a really scathing comment only to be brought up short by a definite quirk of his lips. I wouldn't say he actually *smiled* at me, but it was as near as he'd ever come to it. I laughed aloud, my temper evaporating instantly. "Oh, all right,

Spock. You win. I guess I must have dropped off for a while. The sun certainly seems to have moved halfway across the sky. How long have we... er... been asleep?"

"Approximately four point five hours. I say approximately, because I cannot, of course, state with any degree of certainty the exact moment when either of you fell asleep, but... "

"O.K., O.K., we get the message," laughed Jim. He stifled another yawn and scrambled to his feet. "Well, I don't know about you two, but I'm starving! Come on, let's get back and have lunch." A devilish grin materialised on his face. "Last one back lights the fire!"

"Hey, that's not fair!" I yelled at the vanishing figure. "You know I'm no good at lighting fires!"

"Don't worry, Doctor, I am."

I turned to stare at Spock. "You? Aren't you going to go tearing off after him then?"

"Certainly not! I see no logic in expending energy unnecessarily."

I eyed him suspiciously. That's the trouble with our Vulcan. You're never sure whether he's telling the absolute truth, or merely humouring you. I decided to give him the benefit of the doubt. "Well, thanks anyway. I did warn Jim I was no boy scout."

"I believe the phrase is 'Don't mention it.' Shall we go?"

Waving a hand expansively, I intoned, "Lead on, Macbeth. Or was it Macduff? Oh, who cares anyway? I never could stand Tennyson!"

He stared at me in amazed disbelief. "Tennyson?"

I grinned wickedly. "Just testing." As we started out after Jim, I couldn't resist the temptation to add innocently. "Any school child knows it was Milton."

"Well, what do we do now?" We looked at Jim enquiringly. "Are we going to stay up here another night, or shall we start back now? We could go and explore that river we saw." He cast a sidelong, teasing glance in my direction. "Unless you want to take another look at the lake, Bones?"

I chose to ignore that last remark. "I think we ought to start down. After all, there's not a great deal to do up here, is there?" I tried hard not to sound too eager, but truth to tell, in spite of the view, the sooner we were off this rock the better I'd be pleased.

Jim grinned in perfect understanding. "O.K., we'll go down. Let's get the stuff together. Bones, douse the fire while Spock and I dismantle the tent."

I didn't need any second bidding, believe me. By the time they'd got the tent dismantled I'd extinguished the fire, got all the rest of the gear packed, and was standing waiting.

Jim chuckled. "Now that's what I call efficiency. You're a regular little beaver when you set your mind to it, aren't you? Or maybe you've got an... ulterior motive, huh?"

I assumed an air of outraged innocence. "Who, me? I don't know what you're talking about, I'm sure!"

"Yeah, I'll just bet you don't," he laughed. "Come on, then, let's get going."

The downward trip was a great deal less hair-raising than the one up; nevertheless, I picked my way carefully. One tumble down a mountain was quite enough, thank you, and I breathed a sigh of relief on reaching flat ground. We flopped down for a breather... Well, when I say 'we', I don't, of course, include you-know-who. He wouldn't know how to flop down anywhere, and remained standing looking up at the sky.

"Which way's the river?" Jim asked of no-one in particular.

"What river?" I murmured absently, lying back with eyes closed.

"What river? The river we're supposed to be going to explore. The river we saw from up there."

"Oh, that river." I gestured vaguely. "I think it's over that way somewhere."

"Negative, Doctor," said a voice somewhere above me. "We must travel north-eastward."

On this occasion I wasn't about to argue, bowing to his superior knowledge. I wasn't any too sure myself. Navigating and route-finding is not one of my specialities... along with mountain climbing, lighting fires...

"Right, come on, then." Jim jumped to his feet.

"What, now?" I glowered up at him. "We've only just got down here. Can't we have a rest?"

"We've been resting all morning. Come on, lazybones, we don't need to hurry. We can just wander along in the general direction of the river."

I got grumblingly to my feet, vowing that this was definitely the last time I went camping with Jim Kirk. All my good resolutions of the morning had flown out the window, and I stomped along after the other two in high dudgeon.

Spock, needless to say, was perfectly right, leading us unerringly to the river bank. You know, one of those days that Vulcan's going to come a cropper, and I just hope I'll be around to see it! Oh, I dunno though, maybe not. It's very comforting to have a constant in our ever-changing lives. P'haps just a little, teensy weensy error of judgement? However, to get back to what I was saying... What was I saying? Oh, yes.. the river.

I plonked myself down on the river bank and proceeded to peel off my boots and socks. Inching forward, I introduced my bare feet to the water cautiously, holding my breath for the anticipated cold. I was agreeably surprised. The water, whilst not exactly warm, was pleasantly soothing to my hot, tired feet, and I luxuriated in the feel of the eddying whirls as I wiggled my toes. "Hey, Jim," I called. "Fancy an instant prescription for aching feet?"

"Too late, Bones," a voice answered close by, and I turned my head to find Jim a few yards downstream, legs dangling in the river. "It doesn't need a doctor to dish out this particular prescription."



The pair of us just sat and relaxed, appreciating the warm solitude, Spock having temporarily disappeared. I inhaled deeply, a thousand scents of the open air rushing in on nostrils too used to the sterile atmosphere of a starship. The warm air was filled with the sound of birdsong, and a little further along, a stream tumbled over rocks into the river. There's something about the sound of rippling water and birdsong that's infinitely soothing. It was so peaceful there... literally another world.

"Ah, this is the life," Jim sighed contentedly. "Warm sunshine, cool water, no responsibilities. Just do as you like, when you like."

I eyed him speculatively. "You'd get bored after a while, Jim. You couldn't survive without your precious Enterprise. Come on now, admit it. You'd be climbing the walls within a week!"

"A remarkable feat, Dr. McCoy, since there are no walls."

I twisted round. "Where did you disappear to?" I demanded of our pointed-eared friend.

"I have been endeavouring to locate a suitable site to serve as a base."

"And did you find one?"

"Of course." He spoke as if it were a foregone conclusion... which I suppose it was, knowing Spock. He'd find a suitable camp-site in the middle of the Sas-a-Sahr Desert! "I have traced the source of that stream," He inclined his head in the direction of the bubbling brook. "Just beyond those trees - there is a clearing which will be quite adequate for our needs."

"Great," said Jim. "Let's set up camp, then we can go for a walk."

Having pitched the tent, we set off along the bank on a journey of exploration, and I was lulled into a sense of false security, nothing untoward having happened to me for over twenty-four hours. Maybe the fates had decided that enough was enough and had now tired of making me jump through hoops. I ambled along in the wake of Jim and Spock, feeling totally relaxed... even happy. Gradually the gap between us widened until the other two were almost out of sight. I stopped for a moment and looked about me, drinking in the utter... tranquillity... of the place. I was just about to say 'silence' there, but that would have been altogether the wrong word; from every angle came the rustle of leaves moving gently in the warm breeze, the song of a bird, the sound of rippling water and the soporific hum of myriads of insects. No, silent it certainly wasn't, but a person could stand a lot of this particular kind of 'noise'.

A distant shout broke into my reverie and I stared in the direction of the sound. Squinting against the sun, I could just make out a small figure - Jim, I guessed. Our Vulcan certainly wouldn't be standing there doing an impersonation of a windmill! I waved back; he started yelling and seemed to be pointing towards the river. Really, I thought, *doesn't he realize I can't possibly hear what he's saying from this distance? Probably just indicating where they're going so I won't get lost.* I nodded understanding... which was equally as silly, as he was too far away to make out a nod of the head, and he waved his arms frantically, again pointing to one particular spot. "All right!" I yelled. "I read you!" I waved both my arms and practically nodded my head off, which must have convinced him that I understood as he disappeared from view.

I started up the trail, sighing deeply. They obviously expected me to get lost on top of everything, else why would Jim go to such lengths to let

me know where they were going? I came to a halt again, admonishing myself firmly. "Don't be so bloody stupid, McCoy! Of course they had to tell you where they were going! This is a strange planet. *Anyone* would get separated from his companions unless they kept in communication! Stands to reason! You're getting paranoid, my lad, so cut it out this minute!"

Well, that told me.

I grinned. It's a good thing there was no-one about, or they'd be thinking I'd flipped my lid. Having got things back into perspective, I followed in the wake of my companions. They couldn't be too far ahead, I reasoned after a while. I must be pretty near the spot Jim had indicated by now. I strolled along the bank, keeping an eye out for any sign of them and, rounding a bend, I stopped short in my tracks. I gazed, mesmerised. There, spanning the river right in front of me, was an exquisite natural arch of the most beautiful pale pink rock I have ever seen. I suppose at one time it had been merely an outcropping, but centuries of being slowly eroded by the eddying waters had worn a passage through it. From my vantage point, the angle of the sun lent an inner radiance to the pink rock, and the whole fantastic structure seemed to glow. I stepped closer to the edge of the bank. From somewhere in the distance I heard a muffled shout, and looking round I could just make out two figures moving in my direction, arms waving madly. I waved back happily, congratulating myself on having had no difficulty in re-locating my friends. Heavens, if I *had* managed to get lost, they'd never have let me live it down! Satisfied that Jim and Spock knew exactly where I was, I turned back to my contemplation, my eyes drawn like a magnet to the glowing pink bridge.

Almost unconsciously, I started to walk slowly along the bank, only dimly aware of the distant shouts of my approaching friends. A little nagging voice at the back of my mind told me that maybe I ought to find out what they were yelling about... but like a fool, I gagged it. I took another step... and the ground beneath my feet moved. Suddenly I understood. All that shouting and pointing and waving... I should have listened to that little voice. Too late, I realised that I had walked blithely into the trap they'd obviously been trying to warn me about!

I stood, frozen, in an attempt to avoid aggravating the already trembling earth, but alas, the damage had already been done. The whole bank where I stood began to crumble under my feet, and I made a futile attempt to retreat to firmer ground. My frantic efforts were unrewarded, and I found myself in deep water - literally. Cursing and spluttering, I broke the surface, arms flailing in the effort to stay afloat. Guess what? I'm no great swimmer either! Amidst my struggle to keep breathing, I found time for the ironic thought that I might, after all, gain first hand knowledge of that theory about drowning.

Actually, I'm exaggerating just a little. I can swim, but I'm no expert either, and if I'd been alone I might have had difficulty in getting up the bank again. Fortunately, Jim and Spock were on hand... at least, they were hurtling towards me at breakneck speed.

"Bones!" The voice sounded much nearer now. "Bones, are you all right? Bones!"

I spat out a mouthful of water. "I'm O.K., Jim."

"Hold on!" he yelled. "We're coming!"

"Hold on to what?" I yelled back. God, I was beginning to sound like Spock! Obviously that 'contamination' he's always on about works both ways. There was a loud splash nearby, and I turned to see a dark head slicing through the water in my direction. "There was no need for that," I

shouted. "I can swim, y'know."

Spock trod water alongside me. "Indeed? That was not the impression we gained. You gave every indication of being in difficulties."

"Difficulties?" I echoed mildly. "Why, whatever gave you that idea?"

"There is no need to adopt such an attitude, Dr. McCoy," Spock remonstrated loftily. How the hell anyone could maintain an air of affronted dignity whilst up to the neck in water, is beyond me, but somehow he managed it.

I looked daggers at him. "All you had to do was help me up the bank," I argued, "but oh, no, not you! You had to go the whole hog, didn't you, as usual? Why can't you, just for once... Hey, where are you going?"

He turned to look at me, "You evidently do not require my assistance. I had assumed you were in difficulties. However... "

"Well, of course I'm in difficulties, you... you... animated collection of micro-circuits! You don't imagine for one minute that I'm enjoying this, do you? I didn't actually *jump* in here for a swim!"

"Then I take it you do wish to get out of here?"

"We..ell," I drawled, "I wasn't planning on taking up an amphibious life. Of course I want to get out!" I snapped. "All I was pointing out was that you didn't have to come diving in after me! Now the two of us are gonna have to be - "

"Hey, is this a private battle, or can anyone join in?" An amused voice on the bank cut across my tirade. "You two pick the darndest places to start one of your... verbal battles! Are you coming out or not?"

Spock and I glared at each other, then I started to swim towards the bank.

"No, Bones." Jim held up a hand. "Not here. This bank's none too stable. You'd both better move further downstream." He took a couple of wary steps, then moved carefully along, testing the ground as he went. We followed, our slow progress punctuated by frequent showers of crumbling earth as Jim's probing feet dislodged yet more of the treacherous, shifting riverbank. About twenty yards downstream, he stopped. "Hold it!" he called out. Bracing himself, he stepped nearer the edge, leaning forward slightly, putting all his weight on the furthestmost foot. Nothing happened. Tentatively he moved the other foot.

"I think this is O.K."

He knelt on the edge and extended a hand to Spock. "Careful now, I don't know how safe this bit is."

With Jim's help, Spock succeeded in gaining the bank. "Right, Bones, your turn now."

I eyed the slope doubtfully. "You sure it's safe?"

Jim sighed. "I'm not sure about anything at this moment. But it hasn't collapsed yet, and there are two of us kneeling here. Come on - for heaven's sake, hurry up!"

"But... what if it isn't? What if I prove to be the straw that broke the camel's back?"

"Then we'll *all* end up back in the river," shouted Jim in exasperation. "Give me your hand, and stop looking for problems!"

I approached the side with trepidation and my extended hand was grasped firmly. "O.K., I've got you. Now, don't make any sudden movements. Spock, you grab his other hand. Right, that's it. Bones, don't do anything. Above all, don't start kicking out! Just leave it all to us."

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes, letting my body go limp as I felt myself being lifted. Why did I close my eyes, you ask yourself? Well, the answer's very simple, really - I'm a coward. If this bit of the bank suddenly disintegrated under us, then I didn't want to see the water come rushing up to meet me again.

With a feeling of mingled relief and slight disbelief, I realised that my feet had encountered terra firma. This feeling quickly gave way to a smouldering anger as I stood dripping before my companions... well, Spock was dripping too, but that was his own fault. Jim opened his mouth.

"Don't - just *don't* - say anything," I warned.

"But Bones, I... "

"I said save it."

He glanced helplessly at Spock, but obviously no help was forthcoming from that quarter. "Bones, I *did* try to warn you. I thought you understood... when you waved, I mean... "

I drew myself up. "I do not wish to discuss it," I said icily. "I'm going back to camp. You two can do whatever you like."

I turned about and started back the way I had come. For the second time in as many days I squelched my way along, feeling decidedly sorry for myself. *Just one more disaster*, I vowed silently - *just one...*

I swear someone up there was monitoring my thoughts.

The trek back to camp was accomplished in stony silence, Jim and Spock keeping well back out of my way. As the tent came into view, my first thought was, quite understandably, to go and get out of my saturated clothes. I didn't want pneumonia on top of everything else! Steadfastly ignoring my two companions, I pulled aside the tent flap and stepped through.

Have you ever had one of those days when nothing - but *nothing* - goes right? While I stumbled around in the sudden gloom, my feet somehow got tangled up in something, and I went sprawling! I reached out instinctively to grab something to break my fall... which isn't easy in a tent. There's not a lot to grasp, except the material itself, so... You've guessed.

My hand closed on the fabric of the tent wall and the whole thing came tumbling about my ears.

My shouts and struggles brought Jim and Spock running, and I was hauled unceremoniously from the enveloping folds. I shrugged off their helping hands and struggled to my feet.

"That does it! That's enough! I'm going back to the ship."

"But Bones -"

"No 'buts', Jim. And no arguments! A body can only take so much, and I've had more than my share these past two days. Where's my communicator?" I rummaged around on my belt for the required item. Naturally it wasn't there, and I accepted the fact as a matter of course. It fitted the pattern. "Would one of you mind contacting the ship, please?"

Jim and Spock exchanged glances and Jim shrugged in resignation. "O.K., have it your own way. We'd have had to go back tomorrow anyway." He flipped open his communicator. "Kirk to Enterprise."

At least the reply came promptly. "Yes, Captain? Scott here."

"Scotty, we're returning a little early. Alert the transporter room, three to beam - "

"Nothing doing!" I declared firmly.

Jim stared at me, open-mouthed, for a second. "Just a minute, Scotty." He snapped the lid shut. "Now what? I thought you wanted to go back to the ship?"

"I do, but I'm not going through the transporter. The way my luck's been running lately, I'd probably never rematerialise! Get them to send a shuttle down."

"Aw, come on, Bones. Don't you think you're being a little paranoid?"

"Maybe. But I'm still not going through the transporter!" I insisted vehemently. Paranoia or no paranoia, I was sticking to my guns. By now I was quite convinced that some dark demon was treading on my heels, deliberately lying in wait to pounce at every opportunity. If they wanted me to go through that diabolical contraption, they'd have to tie me up! "I mean it, Jim. I'm not going through that thing!"

Jim flung up his arms in exasperation then flipped open the communicator. "Sorry about that, Scotty. Change of plan. Can you send a shuttle to collect us instead?"

"A shuttle? Whit wid ye be wantin' wi' a shuttle, Captain? There's naething wrang wi' the transporter."

"Please. Scotty. It's a long story. Don't argue, just... send a shuttle - please."

"Verra weel, sir. I'll get onto it right away."

"Thanks, Scotty. I'll explain later. Kirk out." He turned back to me. "Satisfied, Doctor.?"

I returned his gaze a little sheepishly. "Yeah, I guess so. I'm sorry, Jim, but honestly, would you feel any differently if you'd just spent the last two days the way I have?"

He grinned at me sympathetically. "No, I don't suppose I would. I can certainly see your point. Well, we'd better get packed up. The shuttle won't be very long."

It was with a profound sense of relief that I watched the shuttle come to rest. The door slid open and young Chekov's smiling face appeared in the doorway. He jumped down and came to join us, relief written plainly on

his features.

"Captain, I'm glad to see you're all right. Mr. Scott a was a little worried when you asked for a shuttle..." His voice faltered as he looked at each one of us in turn, his gaze flicking over Spock and coming to rest on my dripping person. "Er.. Mr. Spock, Dr. McCoy, you're all wet... sir."

"Congratulations, Mr. Chekov. Full marks for observation."

I know, I know, it wasn't *his* fault, but I wasn't feeling particularly benevolent at the time. I stomped past him into the shuttle and settled myself soggily into a passenger seat, leaving the other three to stow the gear.

With Spock at the controls, we lifted off... I thought. I stared disbelievingly, leaning forward to see out of the window, as the ground which we had just thankfully left suddenly loomed ahead again.

"Hey, what's going on? Why are we going back down?"

"If I knew that, Doctor, I would endeavour to correct the fault." Spock's hands were flying over the controls. "Mr. Chekov," he flung over his shoulder. "Did you have eny trouble bringing the shuttlecraft down?"

The lad looked uncomfortable. "Well, sir - not exactly."

His tone glacial, Spock remarked, "That is not an answer, Ensign. Either you did, or you didn't. Please be more precise."

Poor kid. He turned bright red and stared down at his nervously twisting hands. Fortunately, he was spared Spock's icy, intimidating stare, as that individual was too occupied in preventing us from crashing into the trees whizzing past below to spare him even a glance. But that didn't stop Jim giving him the treatment.

"Mr. Chekov."

Chekov raised his eyes to meet those of his Captain. "Yes, sir."

"Answer Mr. Spock's question. Did you experience any difficulty on the way down?"

"N...no, sir. It's just that.. well, the guages were fluctuating slightly. It was only momentary, sir, and I had no trouble with the actual flight."

"Fluctuating guages?" Jim glanced across at Spock. "The sensors didn't pick up any trace of magnetic instability, did they?"

"No, Captain, but that does not mean that there isn't any. The very nature of magnetic instability makes it difficult to determine. It would certainly explain our present predicament."

I was starting to panic. "Can't you do something? Switch to manual, or something?"

"I have already done so, Doctor, with little effect."

"So what do we do now?" I yelled. God, would this nightmare never end?

Spock glanced at me fleetingly. "Calm down, to begin with." His voice was like a douche of cold water and had the desired effect. I sat

back and tried to relax. "Our only option," he continued in his usual unruffled tone, "is to endeavour to remain airborne, out of range of the trees and cliffs below, until such time as we emerge from the affected area. It is unlikely that the magnetic field is of any appreciable size, or sensors would indeed have detected it. Indeed, I am at a loss as to how none of the survey teams have detected any anomaly. Of course, this is the first time a shuttlecraft has been used, which could explain it to some extent. I can only theorise that these magnetic disturbances are sporadic and widely dispersed. In the vernacular, gentlemen, we'll just have to 'ride it out'."

I bit back an angry retort. It was all very well for him to say 'ride it out', but I was already in a state of nervous exhaustion, to say nothing of physical discomfort. I had not, after all, got out of my wet clothes, that last unfortunate occurrence down there having rendered me incapable of any rational thought save that of getting back to the ship in double quick time.

I shivered with a combination of cold and apprehension and hunched miserably down into my seat, eyes shut tightly against the hair-raising view from the window. The next few minutes are something I do not care to dwell upon; suffice to say that Spock and Jim both had their work cut out wrestling with the controls in their battle to keep us airborne. The shuttle was dashed about like a cork in a whirlpool, and I clamped my chattering teeth firmly together and settled myself to 'ride it out'.

The buffetting stopped as suddenly as it had started. I opened my eyes warily. "Are we out of it?"

"Seems like it, thank God!" breathed Jim, a little raggedly.

A quick glance out of the window confirmed it, as the ground fell sharply away. In no time at all, we'd cleared the atmosphere and emerged into the welcome blackness of space, that damned planet now a swiftly receding globe in the distance.

Jim grinned at me. "You can relax now, Bones, we're going home."

It's good thing he turned back to the controls at that minute, or he'd have caught a very uncomplimentary glance aimed at him!

We stepped down from the shuttle into the welcome safety of the hangar deck.

"Well, here we are," breezed Jim. "We made it in one piece."

"Thank God for that!" I exclaimed with heartfelt relief. "That was without doubt the most disastrous, most diabolical. most... most... "

"Calm down, Bones, it wasn't *that* bad. You've got to admit there *were* compensations."

"Compensations?" I spat out savagely. "Captain, *nothing* can compensate adequately for the traumas of the last couple of hours! Thanks to your hair-brained scheme, it's going to take me weeks to pluck up the courage to step off this ship again!"

"Oh, come now, Doctor, you cannot blame the Captain for the unfortunate accumulation of incidents on Deimos."

I swung to confront Spock. "Oh, can't I? Well, let - me - tell - you - " I stepped up close, punctuating each word with a sharp prod in his damp chest - "Next time you - either of you - go on shore leave, just count me out, will you? In future, I'm staying right here on the ship - where it's safe!"

Have you ever had the feeling that the whole universe has a grudge against you personally? I'd no sooner got the words out of my mouth when the most ear-splitting wail had us all staring at each other in horror. The unmistakable sound of a red alert! My mouth fell open in disbelief. "I don't believe it! I just don't believe it!"

With one accord, the four of us dashed for the turbolift and tumbled inside, Jim shouting the command to take us to the bridge even as the doors slid together. We catapulted onto the bridge to a scene of organised chaos.

"What's going on?" Jim yelled above the strident wail of the alarm.

Scotty swung round with undisguised relief. "I don't know, Captain," he shouted. "I've got everyone checking, but as far as we can tell, there's no reason for the alarm!"

"No reason?" bellowed Jim. "Then why... Oh, for Pete's sake, will someone shut off that racket?"

"We canna, sir," yelled back Scotty. "There must be a short somewhere. We havena' traced it yet."

Jim clapped his hands over his ears. "Spock, see if you can get that damned thing silenced before we all go deaf!"

The order was superfluous, as Spock was already on his knees in front of an open panel. With a cursory glance at the complex circuitry, he solved the immediate problem by the simple expedient of ripping out the wires.

A concerted sigh of gratitude swept the bridge as the cacophony subsided. "Right," began Jim, settling into the vacated command seat. "Anything on sensors? Asteroids? Magnetic clouds? A ship? Damn it, *something* must have triggered the alarm!"

I glanced round nervously from my position behind the Captain's chair, giving serious consideration to resigning my commission and getting a nice, safe, ground-based job. *This* really was too much.

From all stations came negative reports. Jim leaned forward. "But that doesn't make sense. Red alerts don't go off by themselves."

Spock straightened slowly. "This one did, Captain," he started, hesitantly. Spock - *hesitant*? Several pairs of eyes stared at him, and he shifted uncomfortably.

Jim's voice was ominously quiet. "Explain."

Spock stared straight ahead, refusing to meet Jim's eyes. "If you recall, sir, I was overhauling the sensors the day before we left for mos. They were in need of adjustment after we passed through that ion storm four days ago."

"And?"

"One of the relays was insufficiently insulated. The alarm could have



accidentally activated at any time during the past three days. Of course, in normal circumstances, such an oversight could not possibly have occurred, but... well, sir, you *were* inordinately anxious to depart to Deimos at the earliest possible moment, in case the Doctor - "

"Yes, yes - all right, Spock." Jim stopped him hastily, his eyes darting to my face.

Eyes narrowed, I advanced purposefully. "You! Yet again, you're at the bottom of this... this... trail of catastrophies!"

"Bones!" He stared at me, sidling out of the command chair and inching slowly towards Spock... the coward! "Bones! Come on, Bones, take it easy. Remember we're back on the ship now. Attacking your Captain is a court-martial offence. Bones!"

I flexed my fingers, the light of battle in my eyes. "It'll be worth it!" I answered, still advancing. "For what I've been through these past two days. And it's all your fault! If I hadn't let you persuade me to go down there in the first place, I wouldn't be a nervous wreck now!" I came to a halt scant inches from him heedless of the hovering Vulcan. Our eyes met and locked in a battle of wills.

No contest, really, I dropped my eyes. "Oh, what's the use?" I flung at him. "Serves me right, I suppose. I should've had more sense than to listen to you!"

"Bones, I'm sorry, honestly I am. But it wasn't *all* my fault. Be reasonable. I admit I did go to considerable lengths to persuade you to come to Deimos, but it was all for your own good. You needed a break every bit as much as the rest of us. We're friends, for heaven's sake! I wanted to help!"

"Help? With friends like you, who needs enemies?"

"Doctor, you are over-reacting. Perhaps if you... "

Recklessly, I turned on Spock. "You keep out of it!" I yelled. "You're as bad as he is!"

I know, I was pushing my luck. It's a good thing we all know each other as well as we do, otherwise I'd have been within a hair's breadth of being smashed to the deck. As it was, he merely blinked and stepped back a pace, flashing a sympathetic 'over to you' glance at Jim.

I glared at both of them for long seconds, then, "Oh, to hell with it. I'm going to get changed before I catch pneumonia. Just one thing before I go - if ever either of you gets the brilliant idea of inviting me along on one of your camping trips again - forget it!"

With that parting shot, I spun on my heel and started towards the turbolift.

"Er... Bones?"

I stiffened, every nerve-end jangling at the sudden change in that politely enquiring voice. I stood waiting, refusing to turn and face him.

"I just wondered," he went on supremely matter-of-factly. "Does this mean you won't be coming with us to the crystal caves when we reach Andromicus? If you remember, it was all arranged months ago, and you promised to... to... "

His voice faltered as I turned very slowly, fists clenched at my sides, glaring murderously at him through narrowed eyes.

"Er... yes... well... I... er... take it you've changed your mind?"

I gritted my teeth. "Don't push it, Captain," I grated out slowly. "Everyone has his breaking point, and I reckon I've just about reached mine!"

As I stood there, deliberating on whether strangling Jim was sufficient incentive for inviting instant death by way of tal-shaya, I suddenly became aware of an audience. I'd completely forgotten that we were standing in the middle of the bridge! I glanced round swiftly. God, they were *all* there - Scotty, Sulu, Chekov, Uhura... all watching the confrontation with a mixture of apprehension and amusement.

Overcome with embarrassment, I muttered something incomprehensible and escaped to the privacy of the turbolift.

*Never again*, I vowed as the lift carried me down. *Never, ever, again.....*

I had no intention whatsoever of accompanying Jim and Spock to the crystal caves of Andromicus. "No, thanks," I said. "I'm staying right here on the ship. I still haven't recovered from our last shore leave!"

"But Bones," pleaded Jim, "surely you're not going to let one unfortunate incident... well, a few unfortunate incidents," he hastily amended at my incredulously raised eyebrow - that Vulcan hasn't got the monopoly on raised eyebrows. "You're not going to hold that trip to Deimos against me for ever, are you?"

"Of course not," I drawled pleasantly. "I forgave you weeks ago. You know I'm not one to bear grudges."

"Forgave *me*?" A flash of indignation crossed his face. "Well, I like that! Of all the... " He pulled himself up sharply and smiled disarmingly. "Oh, well, let's not go into all that again. Are you coming?"

The nerve of the man! I took a firm stand. "No."

"But Bones - "

"No."

He sighed loudly. "You're being deliberately difficult, aren't you? Ah, well, I'll just have to go and confess to Spock that he was right, and I was wrong." He turned away.

"Just one cotton-picking minute." I was galvanised into action, grabbing his arm. "What did you say?"

He looked at me innocently - too innocently. "When? What about?"

"You know what I mean. Spock was right about what? What's he been saying?"

"Oh, that," he said nonchalantly. "Just a private disagreement. I was sure you'd have forgotten all about Deimos by now, and would be looking forward to visiting the crystal caves. Spock was of the opinion that you'd

still be nursing a grievance and wouldn't set foot off the ship this shore leave. I told him that was utter rubbish, but he obviously knows you a great deal better than I do."

My ready temper flared - as Jim no doubt knew it would. "Still nursing a grievance? Who does he think he is, the jumped-up, pointed-eared amateur psychologist! I'll show him! Thinks I'm scared, does he? So all-fired sure of himself! Well, he's in for a shock, isn't he? When do we leave?"

He grinned in triumph. "Tomorrow morning, 0600 sharp."

Me and my big mouth! I'd walked right into that one. I looked at him suspiciously. "You made all that up, didn't you?" I accused. "All that rot about Spock... You deliberately tricked me! Of all the underhand, low-down... I've a good mind to stay on the ship after all!"

The grin vanished. "Bones, you can't! All right, I admit I tricked you. It was the only way I could think of to persuade you to come. I'm sorry. You won't change your mind, will you... please?"

There was such contrition in his voice that I relented immediately. "Oh, all right. I must want my head examined, and I'll probably regret it, but... All right, I'll come."

"You won't regret it, Bones, I promise. It's a beautiful place, and this time *nothing* will go wrong."

"Don't say that! Every time you say those words, things start to happen - and I don't want them happening to me!"

He laughed and slapped me on the back. "Stop worrying so much, you old grouch."

"Not so much of the 'old', thank you," I scowled.

"O.K., O.K. Tomorrow morning, bright and early. And quit looking so glum! You'll see, it'll be perfectly safe."

Why do I get the feeling we've had this conversation before? Ah well... Andromicus, here we come.

I'm a glutton for punishment, aren't I?

